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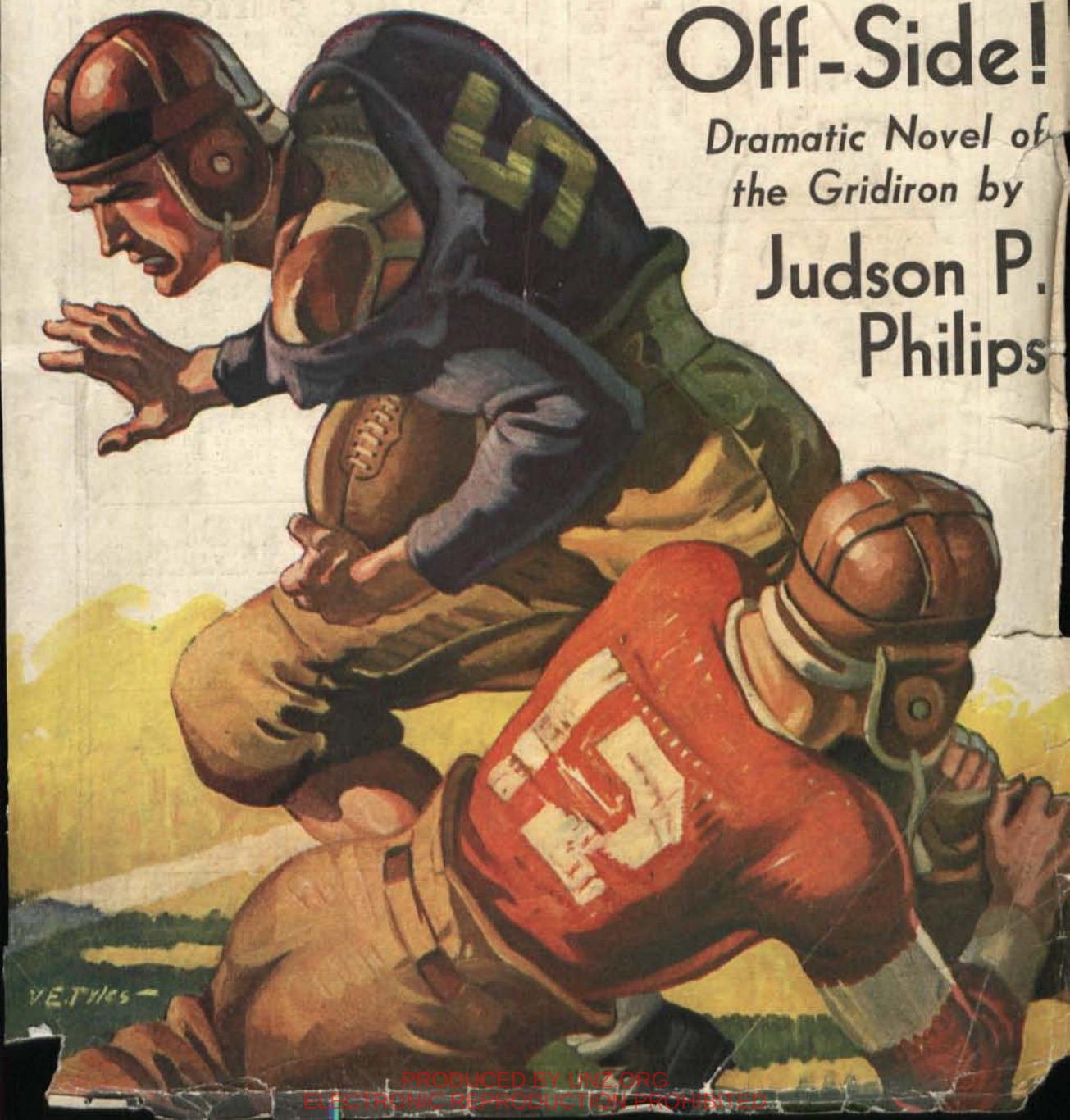

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
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PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
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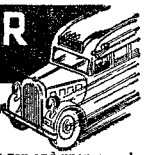

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Senator Markle, who knew a lot about shady politics but little about football, sought to use both in a fierce struggle for victory at the polls

Off-Side!

By
JUDSON P. PHILIPS
Author of "Pigskin Pirates," "Flashing Blades," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BIG JIM MARKLE.

WHEN I look back on that fall I sometimes wonder if I was a sucker. I had what most guys would call a swell job; two hundred simoleons a week, and a chance to triple it in graft and on tips. There were dames and liquor and plenty of good food and practically nothing to do but say "yes" to a big, swell-headed cheese in order to earn it all. But I had to go noble on the boys and here I am, working on a one-horse newspaper in a one-horse town and getting thirty-five a week—when I get it!

You wouldn't think a full-grown man of thirty-six who'd been through the meat chopper backwards and forwards would go soft over a football game and a nineteen-year-old girl with big baby eyes who said, "I think you're wonderful, Mr. Carey." Especially when the girl thought he was wonderful on account of the fact that he'd done a favor for the guy she was in love with. That's me, ladies and gentlemen, prize saperoo of the world—maybe!

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Milburn's line was taking a terrific pounding

But I'm telling you the end first, which is no way to tell a story. It all began on the last Saturday in September. I remember, because it was the first football Saturday of the year and it was just exactly five weeks to election, which was a hell of a sight more important to me than the football end of it. You see, I was working for Big Jim Markle, and this election was the business for him. He'd been Senator for two terms and now he was running for the third time, with a damn good chance of taking a shellacking. People were beginning to get wise to the fact that Big Jim wasn't doing much for them in Washington and that he was a dyed-in-the-wool crook if one ever lived. But it was the old story of a powerful political machine working against a general public that never gets steamed up enough to go to the polls on election day.

But Jim Markle was worried this year. A couple of the best newspapers in the state were taking unholy cracks at him, and the opposition was better organized than usual. Paul Marriot, who'd been governor twice and who was popular with the better class of people, was running against him, and so was Carl Zorn, a crook lawyer.

We didn't worry much about Zorn, because we were bigger crooks than he

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and his mob, but this Marriot was the kind of bird that busts his way into politics every once in a while, honest, full of good intentions, and hard to lick because everybody believes in him.

Jim Markle was a pretty extraordinary guy himself, in spite of the fact that he was a crook. To begin with, he was one of the best public speakers I ever heard. If he had a high-class audience he was witty, keen, caustic. If he was talking to a bunch of rubes he could turn on the old oratorical passion and drag in everything from the American flag to his mother and Abraham Lincoln. He was kind of short and stocky, with a very mobile face that he could twist into fifty different striking expressions.

He had very black eyes, the natural expression of which was shrewd and calculating, but he could make 'em look kind when he was talking to kids —a big act of his—and he could cry at the drop of the hat and pull out the tremolo stop for his voice. The stage lost a great actor in Jim Markle—only I doubt he'd have been much good unless he was reading his own lines. In the winter and fall he always wore black suits and a big, wide-brimmed hat, and a big fur-lined black overcoat when he needed it. In the summer he always wore white suits and Panama hats.

He could look like a preacher, a Wall Street magnate, or a ham actor, according to his audience. He could be sentimental till it came out of his ears, or he could be as tough and hard as a Chicago racketeer.

In private he'd say to me, "Just because I call you my publicity agent and public relations counsel don't get swell-headed about it, Carey. You know you're nothing but a messenger boy!"

In public he'd slap me on the back and say, "Fellows, this is my pal, Tom Carey. The slickest publicity man in America! I'd be lost without Tom Carey. Here, bartender! You're not pourin' that drink for a geranium! Tom Carey always drinks double ryes!"

Well, as long as I was getting my liquor and my cut of the gravy I didn't care what he said to me, public or private. But I'm beating myself to the gun again.

BIG JIM had spoken at a political rally at the capital that Friday night, and, as usual, we got stinko with a few of the local boys afterwards—boys who knew enough to keep their mouths shut—boys who were slated to get a few special favors from Big Jim if he was reëlected. Well, it's a law of nature if you get stewed at night and don't turn in till three or four A.M., you're going to have a headache the next day. We managed to stay in the hay until well past noon, although I was dragged out of bed a couple of times by people on the phone asking for Big Jim.

"Senator Markle's attending to his correspondence," I would say, "and cannot be disturbed." I didn't say whether the correspondence was blonde or brunette. Oh, there were always dames on Big Jim's parties.

Personally, I always look like I'd been put through a laundry wringer after one of those binges, but Big Jim can get up, shave, take a shower, and turn out as pink-cheeked as a boy of fifteen. This day we got going a little after one o'clock.

We were due in a nearby town the next day, and though it wasn't much of a run, Jim wanted to get there ahead of time and have a gab fest with some of the local politicians. After breakfast,

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which consisted of three glasses of tomato juice and three cups of strong black coffee for me, and steak, hashed brown potatoes, hot biscuits, honey and a gallon of java for Big Jim—we started out.

Besides Jim and me there was Mills, the chauffeur, driving the car, and Goof Hallor, the Senator's bodyguard, riding up front with Mills. Goof was an ex-pug—so punch-drunk he'd fall asleep right in the middle of something he was telling you. He'd have made one hell of a bodyguard if there'd really been any danger.

But having a bodyguard was just part of Big Jim's theatrical build up. That, and the fact that Goof was a relative of some guy who was a relative of some guy who had a friend who had once done a favor for somebody Big Jim had known when he was a small town lawyer.

On the way out of town we got into a traffic jam. There were hundreds of cars headed the same way we were, traveling in a double line at a snail's pace. Big Jim was restless as the devil, wriggling around in the back seat of our big convertible sedan, chewing on an unlighted cigar. Finally he burst out angrily:

"Say, Mills, what the hell is this? Where are all these mugs going?"

Mills spoke out of the corner of his mouth without looking back. "Football crowd," he said. "State plays Milburn in the first game of the season this afternoon out at the Stadium."

"Football, eh?" said Big Jim thoughtfully.

"Yeah. They expect fifteen or twenty thousand people," said Mills.

"Fifteen thousand!" The Senator sounded incredulous.

"Sure," said Mills. "You didn't think all those drunks in the hotel last night was celebratin' your political speech, did you, boss? Those was alumni, whoopin' it up for dear old State!" Mills never showed too much respect for Big Jim, and I figured he must know about a skeleton or two the Senator had hidden away.

BIG JIM leaned back in the cushions and rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. There was a sort of speculative look in his eyes.

"Pretty crazy about football all through this section, aren't they?" he said to me.

"Crazy is putting it mildly," I said. "Especially with State having a chance for the conference title this year."

The dark eyes of the Senator narrowed thoughtfully. "I haven't seen a football game since I was a kid," he said. "How would you like to stop off and give this the once-over for a while?"

"It's okay by me," I said indifferently. God, I had to laugh. I could tell by the look on Big Jim's face he wasn't interested in the game. He was thinking of the crowd. It would be smart politics, he was figuring, to be seen at the Stadium rooting for State. This town was bugs about football and bugs about State.

"Drive to the Stadium, Mills," said Big Jim.

I suppose if I'd been like the hero in a lot of fiction stories I'd have had a "strange premonition" that those were fateful words. But I didn't. And, to tell you the truth, I wasn't any too keen about going to the Stadium.

You see, before I drank myself out of the job I was the star sports writer for the *Lakeside Star* and used to cover all these games as part of my job. I'd probably run into a lot of the old bunch

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and I wasn't any too proud of the fact that I was heeling for Big Jim Markle. But what the hell, I thought.

We finally got to the parking place and Mills locked the car. He decided he'd like to see the game. Goof Hallor was asleep, and I woke him up.

"Want to see a football game, Goof?" I asked him.

"Sure, Tom. Sure, I'd like to," he said, and fell asleep again.

I slid up to the ticket window and managed to get three seats not very far from the fifty yard line. Someone had turned 'em in at the last minute. As we went through the gate and started to walk along the edge of the field toward our seats, I slipped a look at Big Jim. He had a funny way of walking in crowds. He'd turn half to the right and then half to the left, sort of bowing and smiling—as if he were graciously receiving the plaudits of the crowd. And they were cheering—no doubt about that. But I don't think a soul in the whole place was giving Big Jim a tumble. He was just some other mug fighting his way to a seat.

It took Jim a minute or two to tumble to this, and then I saw a kind of hard, tight-lipped expression come over his face. This wasn't exactly what he had expected. The State team was out on the field warming up, and looking very colorful in their purple and gold jerseys, and everybody was watching them and yelling for them. And just as we got to our seats a yell went up from across the field as the big red team from Milburn came running out.

I pretended to be pretty hard-boiled—I *am* pretty hard-boiled! But the few minutes before the kickoff at a football game do things to my internal workings. I slipped into my seat and started looking over the boys. I wasn't paying any attention to Big Jim.

"Down in front, buddy!" I heard somebody shout.

I looked up and saw Big Jim standing up, sort of looking around. I knew he figured if he made himself conspicuous enough somebody would recognize him. But nobody was giving him a tumble. The two captains were out in the middle of the field with the officials and I saw the coin flicked up in the air.

"*Down in front!*" It was a chorus this time.

Caldwell, the State captain, came running back to our side of the field, and after a brief huddle with the boys the State team trotted out on the field ready to receive the kick-off. State cheer-leaders were shouting through their megaphones at the crowd. The old locomotive yell burst out of a thousand throats with the head cheer-leader doing a back-flip as it ended. The referee's whistle blew and the red team from Milburn moved slowly forward behind the kicker. Toe met ball—

"Hey, Carey, maybe you better tell me what this is all about," said Big Jim Markle in a funny, tense voice.

CHAPTER II.

FIVE THOUSAND VOTERS.

ONE thing you can't do in five minutes is wise anyone up to what any sporting event is all about. I mean, you can explain that in a football game a team has four tries to make ten yards and if they don't make it the other side gets the ball and all that, but the life blood of any big sporting event is what lies behind it.

Take a baseball game for example. If you see a back lot team playing and the bases are full, two out, and the home team three runs behind, it has its elements of drama. The hitter is up there

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to do or die for his club. But he's just a hitter—a name on the score card that doesn't mean anything.

But if the Tigers are playing the Yankees, for example, and it's the Tigers who have the bases full—they're fighting the Yanks for first place—and the hitter is Charley Gehringer—then you've got twice the drama. Because you know that Gehringer is a .340 hitter, that he never gets rattled, and that he's liable to knock the head off the pitcher. And if you add to that the fact that the Yank pitcher is Lefty Gomez, the best southpaw in the league, with a hard one that'll singe your whiskers, you've got something. It's not just any two teams, with any two players battling each other, but known quantities with the World Series dough at stake.

Ninety per cent of the fans can tell you just how good Gehringer is against southpaws, what his hitting average is, which team has the better morale at the moment, how many games Gomez has won that year, why the Yank center fielder moves a little bit over toward right.

There are fifty different factors that tend to screw up that drama to the highest possible pitch—factors which a traveling Roumanian who doesn't know anything about big league ball can't begin to appreciate.

It's the same thing with this football game we're watching now. It would have taken me a good solid hour to explain everything that went into making that kick-off a special thriller. For instance, despite the fact that this is the opening game of the season, this is a high-powered contest on account of the fact that a trick of the conference schedule has brought two of the strongest teams together right off the bat.

Both State and Milburn are figured to have a very good chance for the title. They've both got teams pretty well leavened with seniors who are experienced players. Last year these same two outfits played a 14–14 tie which knocked 'em both out of the running and put 'em in a tie for second place because Marquand was undefeated. Bobby Caldwell, the State captain, and Breckenridge, the Milburn left half, are supposed to be the two best backs in the conference, and there's going to be a fine personal duel between them. In Cowboy Smith and Eddie Creavy State has the best pair of ends in the east, but Milburn's tackles are hot. There should be one hell of a scrap among these four.

And there's one other big factor the experts are watching closely. Milburn has about the best line from tackle to tackle there is. If this line is allowed to play a bit wide, Caldwell and Speed Martin, State's best backs, are going to have an awful job getting off tackle and around end.

The only way that line can be kept drawn in is by a battering-ram fullback who can raise a little hell through guard and center to keep 'em worried. Last year State had such a fullback in Markowski, who was picked for All-American.

But he's graduated, and this afternoon Masters, the State coach, is starting a sophomore named Steve Thomas. A lot depends on whether this green kid can make any impression on the middle of that Milburn line. If he can—well, State has an even chance to win. If he can't they'll have to give up thinking about the title this year. But I couldn't explain all this to Jim Markle in the couple of seconds that the pigskin was in the air—propelled clear to the goal line by Breckenridge's fine

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kick. I just held on to my stomach and yelled!

CALDWELL waited for the ball to drop into his arms, cool as ice. A grand back, that kid, with nerves like an iron worker on a skyscraper. Porter and Hale, Milburn's two hundred pound tackles, were ripping down the field like a couple of runaway trains. I never saw big men cover the ground so fast. For a moment it looked bad. Caldwell had the ball and shot off fast to the right, but this big Hale had come charging down that side of the field and he ran over Burnett, the State right half, who was supposed to take him out as if he hadn't been there at all. It looked like Caldwell was going to be smeared clear down on the ten yard line. But that Caldwell is an artist; he seemed to hesitate like a matador waiting for the charge of the bull—feinted toward the side lines and then spun like a top to the left, with Hale's big meat hooks just sliding off his hips in a despairing dive. Diagonally across the field Caldwell ran like a streak of lightning, and he came clear up to the twenty-five yard line before he finally went down under a heap of Crimson tacklers. Sweet all round, plenty sweet.

Purple and gold in a huddle. Big Crimson linemen stretched out in defensive formation, waiting. For just a second I saw Caldwell's head raised above the rest of his team, calmly surveying the situation.

Then out of the huddle they came in a curious hodge-podge way. I guess Masters stole that stuff from Lou Little. Down—snap—and off! It's Caldwell—Caldwell fighting like a maniac to squeeze his way through a hole off right tackle—a hole that wasn't there. Porter smeared him at the line of scrimmage. Then it's a single wing-back formation to the right with this sophomore fullback Thomas in the ball-carrying position. I could see the Milburn line stiffen. They were going to smear this kid plenty the first time he took off. Maybe if they knocked him off a couple of times he wouldn't be so hot.

But Caldwell crossed 'em on a hell of a smart play—a quick kick from close in behind the lines that had Milburn off guard. Caldwell booted it himself and the ball went sailing over Breckenridge's head in the safety position and rolled clear back to the Milburn fifteen yard line, with Breckenridge chasing it. He scooped it up there, but before he could take a single step back up the field Cowboy Smith and Eddie Creavy hit him like a couple of twin tornadoes.

"A dumb play, wasn't it?" said Big Jim Markle, frowning. "They had two more chances to rush the ball before they kicked, didn't they?"

"Listen, sweetheart," I said, out of breath because I'd been yelling, "I'll take time off some day and give you a lesson in football strategy. That was one of the smartest plays you ever saw. Got the ball clean down in Milburn's territory in two plays."

"But they might have made a first down from scrimmage," said Big Jim.

"Yeah," I said dryly. "Wear themselves out to pick up maybe seven yards when they pick up seventy this way."

"But Milburn has the ball now," said Big Jim, scowling.

"Listen, Big Shot," I said, "I'll explain all this to you later. Right now I'm too busy watching!"

NAYLOR, the Milburn fullback, picks up a couple of yards at center while we're talking. Then Breckenridge starts out on an end

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sweep, and you can hear the crowd draw in its breath. He's like greased lightning on these plays, and once he gets in the clear it's bad news. But Eddie Creavy and Butch Reardon, State left end and tackle, keep forcing him wide on this play, and little Jean Laroque, the watch charm guard of State, comes up fast from behind and smears Milburn's star for a five yard loss.

That puts Milburn in a hole and Breckenridge drops back to his own goal line to kick. He boots a honey clear back past mid-field, where Caldwell grabs it and starts legging it for the side lines, where he's forced out exactly on the mid-stripe.

Once more State lines up in that single wing back formation with the Thomas kid back. I take a good look at him. He looks plenty tough, with huge shoulders and legs under him like a Percheron work horse. He's digging in his cleats, pointing straight at the center of the Milburn line.

When he and that line come together I figure something is going to give! Snap! Thomas goes like a thunderbolt into the center—but it's a delayed cross-buck and he hasn't got the ball at all. Speed Martin gallops around over left tackle and picks up nearly eight yards before the secondaries nail him.

"Caldwell's damn smart," I said to Big Jim. "There's been a lot of talk about this Thomas and Milburn's anxious to know just how good he is. Caldwell's keeping 'em in suspense."

"Funny thing," said Big Jim. He was looking at his score card instead of the game. "This kid Thomas comes from my home town."

"Well, what of it?" I said impatiently.

"I was just wondering," said Big Jim in a funny voice. "The only Thomases I ever knew were dirt poor. The father was sort of an odd job man. I was wondering—"

While he was wondering, Caldwell flim-flammed Milburn once more. It was still Thomas back in that threatening position, but this time Caldwell took the ball and flipped a pass to Eddie Creavy down the side lines that picked up another fifteen yards. It's a first down just inside the thirty yard line. I notice, when they line up, that Milburn is spread out a little more.

This was just what Caldwell had been angling for, and on the next play Thomas took the ball—and no fooling. Straight through the center of the line this big kid ripped his way, his legs churning up the turf like pistons. Head down, he tore his way ahead. I thought they were never going to stop him.

All the way through to Milburn's five yard line he went, and he was dragging three or four tacklers with him the last few yards. State was going nuts up in the stands.

On his first play as varsity fullback the kid had picked up near twenty-five yards.

I guess a lot of the fans forgot about Markowski, last year's star, right then and there.

Nine quarterbacks out of ten, after that display of power, would have just given the ball to Thomas a couple of times and let him lug it over. But Bobby Caldwell was just that tenth quarterback. Oh, he lined up once more with Thomas in the back position. That Milburn line was dug in low, grim, ready to stop his charge. And the charge came—but Thomas didn't have the ball. The whole Milburn team swarmed over him and Caldwell had all day to toss an easy little pass over the line to Cowboy Smith, who touched

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the ball down for six points without anybody laying a hand on him.

CALDWELL kicked the extra point, and it was 7—0 with the first quarter only half over and the Milburn team just a shade rattled. They'd been completely outguessed and outmaneuvered in these first few minutes, and you can bet it didn't do their morale any good.

"That Caldwell is the smartest quarter I've seen in years," I said to Big Jim.

"Who?" he said, kind of absent-mindedly. "Oh, Caldwell! Say, Carey, if this Thomas *is* the boy I think he is, he hasn't got a dime to his name."

"Well, what of it?" I said sharply.

"Well, if he *is* a star player, and he's having a hard time getting through school—what if somebody made it easy for him? What if State won the championship and this Thomas played a big part in it? It wouldn't do the fellow who helped him any harm—say next November?" And he smiled, a crooked little smile.

Honestly, I think my mouth dropped open and stayed that way! Because Big Jim chuckled.

"You're a bright guy, Carey, but you don't have big ideas," he said. "Would you say I was overestimating if I said there were fifty thousand people hereabouts who are rooting their heads off for State to win that title?"

'That's conservative," I admitted.

"Well, if State won the title with Thomas starring, and Big Jim Markle back of Thomas—do you think there might be a few extra votes at the polls? Do you think maybe five thousand voters who might be on the fence would be swung our way?

"Don't you think if I was actively identified with something they're interested as hell in, it might do some good?"

"I've got to admit it might," I said. "It *might* be a honey of an idea."

Big Jim leaned back in his seat and lit a cigar. A funny little smile was playing over his lips. "After the game we'll go back to the dressing room and have a chat with this Thomas. If I'm right about who he is—well, maybe things won't be quite so tough in November as we figured."

CHAPTER III.

PUBLICITY VALUE.

FOR two or three minutes I kind of lost track of what was going on out on the field, as this idea that Big Jim hinted at began to percolate. This was a football-crazy section of the country, as I said before. Big Jim wasn't far off when he said that there would be at least fifty thousand people in and around the capital who'd be rooting for State.

When it comes to publicity, I know my stuff, and I began to see some of the possibilities in the situation. Senator Markle, patron of State—helping to a championship — helping poor boys through school!

Boy, what a build up! I guess the thing closest to the heart of the average American man is sport—and right now in this section it was football.

If Jim Markle could affiliate himself publicly with a clean, wholesome activity of some sort it might help people to forget that he was a grafter, a crook, and a machine politician of the worst order. And it wouldn't do any harm right now with a fellow like Governor Marriot running against him.

There were a lot of things I *didn't*

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think of then, and maybe if I had it wouldn't have made any difference. Right then it looked like a smart idea and I was all for anything that would get Big Jim reëlected, because that meant my very soft and very lucrative job went on as it was. I wasn't thinking what effect Big Jim might have on the Thomas kid, or State College, or the game of football.

I was watching the game again now, but from a slightly different angle. I was watching Thomas—because if Big Jim took Thomas under his wing I'd be dishing out plenty of words about him in the next few weeks. I took a squint at his picture in the program. Not a bad-looking boy—not bad at all. Square jaw, high cheekbones, close cropped, very black hair. His eyes were dark—maybe set a little bit too close together. But he'd certainly pass as a pretty fair example of American youth.

Then I started concentrating on his play out there. He certainly was a powerful big ox now. Caldwell, who had resorted to strategy and guile to make this first score, was playing straight open football now.

State had kicked off to Milburn, held and taken Breckenridge's punt downfield on their own thirty-five. Right now they were giving Milburn's much-vaunted line one hell of a pounding. On play after play, Caldwell was hurling the big sophomore fullback inside guard or tackle with rather devastating results.

Three—four—five yards at a clip he was making. Just when Milburn would dig in and be ready to stop him, Caldwell or Martin would take a flier at one of the ends.

On they drove till they had a first down clear down on Milburn's fifteen yard line. The red team took time out. The water boys rushed out on the field. Thomas had been taking a lot of punishment in there, but he seemed fresh as a daisy.

He didn't stretch out on the ground like some of the others. Instead he kept moving around, flexing his knees—just as if he had a big head of steam up and wanted to get going. Plenty of the old moxie there, I thought.

Well, right after the time out the Milburn team dug in grimly to stop the onslaughts of this human battering ram, and right there smart young Mr. Caldwell crossed them up again. On the very first play he pulls a fake buck at the center of the line. The whole Milburn defense swarms over Thomas and Caldwell flips a pass to Cowboy Smith. It would have been another score but for a fine flying tackle by Breckenridge, who brought the State end down on the two yard line.

They line up again and whamo! Thomas dives at the center again, but this time he hasn't got the ball either. Instead, Eddie Burnett, who's usually just running interference, steps over the line without even being tagged. Smart—awful smart quarterbacking. Of course the Milburn team was up in the air, but it was smart to take advantage of it.

Caldwell kicks the extra point, too, and it's 14—0.

"We'll have to do something about that," Big Jim said, scowling.

"About what?" I asked.

"Thomas has got to do the scoring," he said, sort of absent-mindedly. "Yes, we'll have to do something about that."

"Don't be an ape," I said. "That's damn smart work on Caldwell's part. He's running up his scores with a minimum of effort. Thomas might hammer his way through, but it would take a lot out of him and a lot out of the

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linemen. This way he's using the kid as a threat and getting his scores the easy way."

"MY dear Carey," Big Jim drawled, "I'm not in the least bit interested in strategy. I'm interested in Steve Thomas, who is going to be a big factor in our campaign, though he doesn't know it yet. It's all right for the people out here. They know he's playing one hell of a game. But that's only fifteen thousand of the fifty we want to reach! And the people who read the papers get their kick out of the guy who does the scoring. Thomas could have scored both those touchdowns if they'd given him the ball. We'll have to see to it that they do so after this. I want him to be the high scorer of the conference."

I laughed. "How would you like 'em to take the captaincy away from Caldwell and give it to your boy?"

"If there was any way to arrange it, I'd see *that* was done," said Big Jim gravely.

After that I didn't say anything, because I could see he'd gone a little goofy on the subject. But I had a strange little feeling of alarm. Maybe it wouldn't be so good, after all, for Big Jim to mess around in something he didn't know so much about. Well, that was up to him. I knew he'd make up his mind and there'd be no turning back.

The second quarter of the game was quite a lot different. In fact it was all Milburn—except that they didn't score. Masters, the State coach, took out Caldwell, Thomas, and Martin from the backfield. Red Barnes went in for Eddie Creavy at left end, though that didn't weaken the team much, because he's almost as good as the two first stringers.

But he also takes out Paul Holloway and Laroque, the two guards, and that softens up the line quite a lot. Breckenridge starts to do his stuff a little now and the ball is in State's territory for most of the period. Milburn doesn't have quite enough scoring punch to push the ball over, although once they worked it clear down to the seven yard line.

Big Jim acted very restless through this period. Just before it was over he stood up. "Let's go back and see young Thomas between the halves," he said.

"You haven't got a Chinaman's chance of getting in that dressing room while the coach is giving 'em a pep talk," I said.

"We can try anyhow," said Big Jim. So we went.

Of course I'm always forgetting that everybody else thinks of Markle as a big shot. When we got around to the clubhouse there were a half dozen sports writers hanging around and they all pounced on him. There was always some kind of a story in Jim Markle.

"Enjoying the game, Senator?"

"Didn't know you were a fan!"

"What do you think of the State team?"

Big Jim puts on that expansive smile of his. "Of course I'm a fan," he said. "Used to play the game myself!" Which was a damn lie! "I think State has a fine team—and of course I'm particularly proud this afternoon." And he stopped there—cagey as ever.

"How so?" asked Raphael Jones, star sports writer of the New York *Globe*.

BIG JIM raises his eyebrows in a look of surprise. "Why, didn't you know?" he asked innocently. "Young Steve Thomas is a sort of

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protégé of mine—lad from my home town. Matter of fact—although this isn't for publication, of course—I'm sort of standing back of him during his educational career. He's quite a football player, don't you think, Jones?"

"He has promise," said Jones dryly. He slipped me a wink. He and I used to be good pals when I was in the newspaper game. "Of course your motives in backing him are purely altruistic, Senator."

Good old Rafe! You can trust him to find the rotten spot in any bill of goods anybody handed him.

"I want to see any boy get the advantages that I couldn't have when I was a kid," said the Senator, with a big gesture of his hand. "I wish I knew twenty boys who needed help to get through school."

"Must they have publicity value, Senator?" asked Rafe, softly. "Because if you want to help just *anyone,* I think I could get up a list of names for you. Twenty—or twenty thousand, if your pocketbook'll stand it."

Big Jim's eyes flashed dangerously. But his manner was suave as ever. "Come and see me at my office some time, Jones. I'll be glad to take it up with you." And he turned and walked calmly into the dressing rooms.

Rafe Jones lit a cigarette and looked after him with a twisted little smile. Then he gave me a sharp glance. "This your idea, Carey, trading on this kid's football ability to get publicity for his nibs?"

"So help me, Rafe, he thought it up himself," I said. "Have a drink?" I tapped the flask I was carrying.

"Never touch it till after my story's in," said Rafe. Then he took a deep drag on his cigarette and there was a sort of an angry gleam in his eyes. "Don't bother to send me any publicity on this gag—if you're planning to send some out," he said. "I wouldn't give that louse two lines of space in my column."

"Maybe you'll have to," I said. And I was right about that!

CHAPTER IV.

FIVE GRAND.

I FOLLOWED Big Jim into the locker room, wondering whether he'd managed to get by the doorman or not. I ought to have known he would. But I was stopped.

"I'm Senator Markle's secretary," I tell the old bird who blocks me out.

"Oh, that's okay," he said, and passed me through.

There's something about a locker room that always gets me. I was something of an athlete once myself, and when I get a whiff of liniment, of sweaty jerseys, of the wet rubber mats outside the showers, I guess I feel a little bit like an old fire horse.

This crowd in here were busy as beavers. The boys who had taken part in the first half were taking showers, having quick rubdowns, and getting into fresh uniforms. We never went to all that fuss in my day.

"A wrinkled stocking inside a shoe may cost you a touchdown," old Major Corbin up at Marquand used to say.

There's a big bowl of lump sugar in the middle of a little table and all the players are chewing on pieces of it. Supposed to build up energy. Masters, the State coach, was standing very close to me, talking to Babe McLean, State's big right tackle. McLean had failed to block out his man on a couple of plays and Masters was telling him what he had done wrong.

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I remembered Masters. He had been a pretty good tackle at State about fifteen years ago. He always had the reputation of being a dirty player himself, but I had to hand it to him, he didn't teach that kind of football to his squad, and he was a pretty smart strategist. But he had a sort of sour, sly look that didn't make me cotton to him very much. Later on I was to find out just what kind of a worm he was.

In the middle of all this stood Big Jim Markle, talking in his best "good fellow" manner to young Caldwell, who was putting on a fresh uniform. Nice-looking kid, this Caldwell—tall, fair, with a clean-cut face that suggested he came from pretty good stock. I remembered that his father was one of the biggest bankers in the State and known as a grand gent to everyone who ever had any dealings with him. He was listening to Big Jim with what looked like a sort of strained politeness.

I couldn't help comparing the two of them. Caldwell, young, and clean and bright-eyed—just about a perfect example of young American manhood; and Big Jim, paunchy, sensuous, with those dissipated pouches under his eyes—a guy who had been in every kind of hell hole, every kind of racket, every kind of crooked game there is.

Just in that minute I saw these two stacked up against each other and I wondered just how much of a chance a swell kid like this Caldwell would have against Big Jim. It would be like a college boxing champion fighting against a rough and tumble dock hand who knew every kind of foul there is and uses 'em all!

No chance at all. That's how I figured it. Then I heard Big Jim talking to the kid.

"Damn smart quarterbacking, Caldwell, if you don't mind my saying so. You ran up your scores with a minimum of effort." The baboon! He was quoting me! "Thomas could have smashed his way through for those scores, but it would have taken a lot out of him and your team."

CALDWELL smiled, a not too friendly smile. "You have to mix them up a bit, sir," he said.

"This boy Thomas looks pretty good," said Big Jim casually.

Young Caldwell's lips tightened. "He's got worlds of natural ability," he said. There was a kind of hard quality to his voice as he said it, as if he didn't want to talk about Thomas, but Big Jim barged on.

"I've quite a lot of interest in him, Caldwell," he said. "You see, he comes from my home town."

"Oh!" said Caldwell.

"I'd like to shake hands with him," said Big Jim.

Caldwell shot a glance at Masters, the coach. "We don't usually have visitors between the halves, sir," he said quietly. "Mr. Masters usually has something to say to us. But I guess it's all right—for a minute. Steve!"

Up off a bench across the way rose Thomas. A big brute, even bigger than he looks on the field. He came over, his cleats rattling on the cement floor of the locker room. Right away I saw that picture in the program had prettied him up a bit. Those eyes were set very close together, and his thin lips had a sort of sneering twist to them that stayed there—it wasn't just a smile.

"Hi, Senator," he said, without waiting to be introduced.

"Ah, my boy," said Big Jim, deep and resonant, "you know me, then?"

"I guess everybody in Lakeside

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knows *you,* Senator," said Thomas, and there was acid in that crack!

"And everybody's going to know you, my boy," said Big Jim, quick as a flash. "I'm mighty proud of the game you're playing this afternoon."

"Oh, we haven't showed 'em anything yet," drawled Thomas. And when he said "we" I knew he meant "I." Caldwell looked up sharply from the bench, and there was ice in his eyes. I got a picture right then of another angle of the situation. Thomas' head was too big for his hat size and he wasn't too popular with young Caldwell on that account.

"I haven't a doubt of it, my boy," said Big Jim easily. "Look here, as one citizen of Lakeside to another, I'd deem it a pleasure if you'd have dinner with me tonight after the game. Do you have to stick to your training table?"

Thomas shook his head. "We break training each Saturday after the game," he said. "Don't go back again till Sunday night. Keeps us from getting too fine drawn."

"Splendid," said Big Jim. "Join me at my hotel as soon as you're clear. We'll try to build up an evening for you."

"Suits me," said Thomas.

And then Masters, the coach, was at Big Jim's elbow. "Sorry, Senator," he said, in a deferential tone, "but I've got to have a few words with the squad before we take the field. I'll have to ask you and your friend to leave us alone."

"Certainly, certainly," said Big Jim heartily. "Much obliged for the chance to have a glimpse behind the scenes, as it were."

"Be seeing you, Senator," said Thomas, with that twisted grin.

Right then I stopped worrying about any harm Big Jim might do young Thomas. I had him pigeonholed when we left there as rat number two in this set up.

THERE wasn't much to the rest of that game. State came out like a bat out of hell to start the second half and marched over seventy yards to a touchdown in something like eight plays. The only important thing about it was that with a first down on the three yard line it was Burnett who carried the ball over and not Thomas.

Right after that Milburn put on a flurry of excitement when Breckenridge took the kick and made one of the prettiest touchdown runs behind interference you ever saw—ninety-five yards and nobody laid a hand on him. He was like a streak of lightning when he got going, that Breckenridge, and he had a hip swivel that reminded me of Gary Levan, the Princeton star.

But right after that State turned on the heat again and barged through to another score on power plays, with Caldwell breaking through tackle for an eight yard scoring plunge at the end of it. And the final score stood 27—7 at the end of the game.

Big Jim and I made for the exit a few minutes before the end of the game in order to avoid the jam.

Mills, the chauffeur, was with us and we found Goof Hallor still asleep in the car. He woke up when we started to move.

"I thought we was goin' to a football game," he said, rubbing his eyes.

"You must have dreamed it," I told him.

We went back to the hotel we'd left a few hours before and the management wasn't too glad to see us, because they didn't have any rooms left. The football crowd had taken everything. But there was nothing they could do

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but kick somebody out of a suite on the top floor, because this bunch didn't dare not accommodate Big Jim. He had his hooks into the owner somehow.

Right away Big Jim started ordering dinner. Cocktails, appetizers, fish, roast beef, salad, pie, coffee. And there was a half dozen bottles of champagne ordered on ice.

"The kid won't be drinking," I told him.

"Didn't he say they broke training Saturday nights?" Big Jim asked. "What about dames? You think he'd like it, if we had dames?"

"Are you talking for yourself or for him?" I rapped at him. "You don't know this kid from Adam. How do you know he'll keep his mouth shut if you throw a binge?"

"Maybe you're right," said Big Jim, kind of disappointed.

"You know I'm right. That kid doesn't look like a greenhorn to me."

BIG JIM poured himself a stiff shot of rye from the bottle he'd unpacked from his bag. His eyes were narrowed in a bright, shrewd look. "The more I think about this stunt, Carey, the better I like it," he said. "Why, when I looked at that crowd out there, realized how keen they are about the game, and that there are thousands more like 'em." He took a big swallow and smacked his lips. "If I can help bring a championship to State it'll pack more votes in the ballot boxes than a thousand promises. It's too bad I'm not an alumnus. That'd make it perfect. But I'll *adopt* State as my alma mater!"

"Hey, take it easy!" I said. I poured myself a drink without asking him. That feeling of uneasiness I'd had earlier came back. "You want to take it easy, Jim. You don't understand this college business. It's different from politics; these guys play the game clean. If it ever gets out what you have in mind it'll crucify you!"

He turned a gimlet stare on me. "I'm not goin' to make any mistakes," he said. "I'm counting on you to see to that. There are five local newspapers that'll print anything we turn over to them. I'm counting on you to handle the publicity, and handle it *right!* You get this, Carey, if you muff the deal I'll kick you back in the gutter where I found you and keep you there!"

I tossed off my drink without saying anything. The louse!

About a quarter to seven Steve Thomas turned up. He was all slicked up, but I saw that he hadn't paid over twenty bucks for the suit he was wearing. He had a lot of poise, this kid—more than most youngsters in their second year of college. Then I remembered noticing that he was listed as being twenty-three years old in the program. Most kids are through school at that age. Big Jim turned on a full blast of charm for the boy.

"Shake up the cocktails, Carey," he cried jovially. "This is a moment for celebration. It's been a long time since Lakeside contributed a star player to the football firmament."

Thomas sprawled easy in a chair, while I wrangled a shaker full of Martinis. "This isn't exactly according to Hoyle," Thomas grinned as I handed him a cocktail with an olive in the bottom of it. "But it isn't every kid that has a chance to have dinner with a Senator." He tossed it off without batting an eye and held out his glass for me to refill it.

"We're all kids at heart," said Big Jim. "Now me, I get a kick out of having a star football player as my guest. Did you play in high school,

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Thomas? I don't seem to remember."

Thomas smiled that crooked little smile. "I didn't," he said. "Didn't have the time or the dough. When I came to State I had to work my way through. I found out the guys who were getting the jobs were athletes. So I went out for frosh football. I happened to be good." He shrugged. "Now I get twenty bucks a week for tending one furnace—an hour a day. If I didn't play football I'd have to tend twenty to get that."

"That's chicken feed!" said Big Jim.

Those close set eyes of Thomas' narrowed. "Yeah, I know," he said. He reached in the bottom of his glass for the olive and ate it. "You know, Senator, I've been wondering why you had me to dinner."

BIG JIM turned on a blank look. "Why, my dear boy, it was simply that I was proud of you—proud because you and I came from the same town. I—"

Thomas interrupted, his lips twisted in that thin sneering smile. "Cut the comedy, Mr. Markle. You and I come from the same side of the railroad tracks. We can't kid each other!"

Honest, I nearly burst out laughing at the look on Big Jim's face. The kid had called his hand, and called it quick. Cut out of the same pieces of wood, these two.

Then Big Jim himself smiled, but there wasn't any laughter in his cold black eyes.

"You're a smart kid, Thomas, smarter than I figured. Sure, I had a reason for asking you here. Have another drink and we'll talk about it."

I tried to give Big Jim a high sign, but he missed it, and the kid was holding out his glass. I noticed a couple of bright red spots coming out on his cheeks and I figured he might be tough; but he didn't know too much about drinking liquor, the way he tossed off those two Martinis. But there was nothing to do but fill up his glass. Big Jim took another himself and so did I, but they were so much water to us.

Big Jim pushed the platter of appetizers at the kid and then he started talking.

"You know there's an election coming off in a few weeks, kid?"

"Yeah, I know," said Thomas dryly. "I also know that you stand a good chance of taking it on the chin. But I don't see where I come in on that."

So far the honors were all with the kid, I thought. He was a step ahead of Big Jim all the way.

"I believe in plain talk, kid, and I'm going to give it to you straight. I want to give you a boost. I want to pay your way through college. I want to give you money to spend. And I want to publicize the fact that I'm doing this for you and for State. State's got a fine chance to cop the championship, and if I can make it appear publicly that I've got a hand in it by supporting their star player—well, you can see I won't suffer. Everybody's football crazy around here."

Thomas scowled and said something I wouldn't have given him credit for. "But I'm not the star player," he said. "Bob Caldwell is a hell of a lot better as a back than I am. And there are two or three others—Smith, and Creavy, and Pete Simon, the center, who rate more space than I do."

"I like you for saying that," said Big Jim quickly. "But we're going to *make* you the star. It's newspapers that make stars as much as anything, Thomas. I'm going to try to see to it that you carry the ball on scoring plays.

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I'll have that out with Masters, your coach."

THOMAS smiled thinly. "You'll have to do something about Caldwell, too," he said. "He hates my guts. Thinks I have a swelled head. He deliberately gives the headline plays to someone else."

I started to say something about it being smart football, but I kept my trap shut.

"We'll handle that too, if it's necessary," said Big Jim. "The point is, we're going to build you up into the headline player of the whole conference. And then we're going to sneak in a little about my making it possible for you to go to college—about my enthusiasm over the chance of State winning the title. Get it?"

"I get it," said Thomas, and held out his glass again. I looked at Big Jim and he nodded, so I filled it up. Thomas took a swallow and then he looked at Big Jim. "What is there in it for me?" he asked.

"Suppose you tell me what you think it's worth—what you really need?" said Big Jim, playing smart. Usually when you let a guy name his own price he'll mention something under what you'd offer him.

Thomas drained his glass and said calmly, "How about five grand?"

Big Jim nearly fell on his face. *"What!"* he shouted.

Thomas was cool as a cucumber. "Certainly that isn't too much, Senator. Your reëlection is worth fifty times that to you. You didn't expect me to go in on a scheme like this for marbles, did you?"

Big Jim bit off the end of a cigar almost viciously. I saw he was thinking fast. So far this kid was putting it all over him. But Jim wasn't one to take time over decisions. Anyhow, he'd put himself in a spot. If the kid went out and spilled this now it would do him plenty of harm.

"Okay, Thomas, I'll meet your figure," he said slowly. "But if I'm going to pay you big time dough I expect you to follow orders implicitly. I'm turning you over to Tom Carey here. You're not to make a single statement to the press of any kind without his okay.

"If I want you at parties or to act a certain way toward certain people, you're to do it without question. Carey is going to stick to you like a leech, and if you make one step without his okay—well then, young fella, we'll handle you just the way we would any other guy in our organization who double-crosses us."

His voice was hard as granite, and I remembered a couple of birds who were absent and unaccounted for over the last couple of years. I think Thomas understood, too, because some of the color faded out of his face.

"Don't worry," he said, trying to sound as if he was joking, "I'd murder my grandmother for five thousand bucks."

For a second Big Jim eyed him coldly. Then he grinned. "In that case, let's eat," he said.

CHAPTER V.

SPILLING THE BEANS.

THAT'S hot, says I to myself, I got to be nursemaid to a fullback—and right off the bat I decided it wasn't going to be any kind of an easy job.

They started serving dinner for us in the room, and we cracked the first bottle of champagne with the filet of

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flounder. I knew Big Jim was mad clean through at the way the kid had put it over on him, but Big Jim was a master at concealing what he felt from anyone—excepting me, of course, who knew it so well.

He was quick to see what this Thomas was like—quick to see that this kid was like himself in a way, and that the kid admired anyone who could outsmart somebody else. Right then the boy was feeling pretty good over having driven a sharp bargain with Big Jim.

And Big Jim regaled him with stories about politics—about tricks he had played on men in powerful places. Thomas was getting tight as a coot by the time we got into the second bottle of wine.

"Better take it easy, kid," I told him. "You have to go back to the campus tonight, you know."

He gave me a black look and perversely filled his glass again. "The hell with that bunch," he said. "They're all kids—all stuck on themselves. Imagine a twenty-year-old puppy like that Caldwell who's never done a lick of work in his life lording it over me! Why, Carey, I've earned my own living since I was a kid—selling papers, running errands, even doing a day laborer's work. Those brats make me sick, with their cockeyed talk about sportsmanship—and fair play and all that. That's kid stuff, Carey!"

"Maybe," I said, sucking deep on my cigarette.

His cheeks were flushed and he threw back his head now and laughed a nasty, sneering laugh. "You should have been in on that game this afternoon! Remember when you were in the locker room—the coach was balling out Babe McLean because he wasn't taking his man out properly? It was all I could do to keep from busting out laughing. You know what was happening? On every scrimmage when they got piled up the guy playing opposite McLean was slugging him—in the belly, in the face, anywhere he could. His hands were taped up and he was hurting the hell out of McLean. And do you think McLean let him have it back?"

Thomas rocked back and forth in his chair, laughing. "Oh, no. That isn't sporting! If the other guy kicks your head off you just go on playing 'good, hard football' and don't say anything. That's crazy! That's good sportsmanship!"

"If McLean had slugged him back and the referee had kicked him off the field that wouldn't have done State any good," I said.

"If you're smart you don't get caught," said Thomas. "Eh, Senator? If I'd been McLean I might not have slugged him back, but when I got a chance I'd have stepped right in the middle of his ugly face."

This kind of talk went on all through the meal. You could see this kid had a hell of a resentment against the whole system. Maybe you couldn't blame him—I don't know.

But after a while I stopped giving a damn about that and began wondering just how I was going to get this kid back to his quarters without the whole town knowing he was soused to the ears. I kept trying to flag Big Jim when he'd pour more wine into the kid's glass, but either he didn't get it or else he was just perverse about it.

By ten o'clock the kid was roaring, and he started throwing glasses around the room. That was enough for Big Jim. He went into the next room and came back presently with a check.

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"Here's your money, Thomas," he said grimly. "See that you earn it. Remember, you take your orders from Carey from now on. Now scram."

Thomas got up unsteadily to his feet and he made a low, sweeping bow to the Senator, with that twisted grin on his mug.

"Your humble servant, Mr. Markle." Then he turned to me. "Are you seeing me home tonight, sweetheart?" he asked sarcastically.

Right then I could have slugged him, but I didn't. "You're damn tootin' I'm seeing you home," I said. "And try not to act as if it was a Fourth of July celebration when we go through the lobby."

He was in pretty tough shape. We'd had the windows open in our suite and it was pretty cool, but out in the hall it was hot as a furnace and Thomas began swaying around as though his legs were made of rubber. So much so I had to grab him by the arm and literally hold him up while we got into the elevator. I was so concerned with keeping him in a vertical position that I didn't see we were running head on into trouble as we came out of the elevator on the main floor—didn't see it until I heard a voice that cracked sharp as a pistol shot.

"Thomas!"

I LOOKED up and saw we'd come face to face with young Caldwell, captain of the State team. He looked very handsome, all togged out in soup and fish, and there was a girl with him, her arm slipped through his. One look at her and something hit me smack in the mid-section. She wasn't one of those red hot mammas that Big Jim always had around him.

There was something cool and fresh and delicate about her—her color was her own. Her eyes were grey, and they looked questioningly at me as though she figured maybe I could explain the situation. Right then I wished the last ten years of my life had been something different.

Caldwell's blue eyes had that frosty light in 'em I'd noticed in the locker room that afternoon. He turned very politely to the girl.

"I wonder if you'd mind waiting for me over by the desk, Peg," he said.

"Whasha matter, Cal'well?" Thomas said thickly. "Aren' shoo gonna give us a knock down?"

For a minute I thought Caldwell was going to do literally that. I saw his fists were clenched at his sides. But he just nodded to the girl. She took her hand off his arm, gave him a little pat on the shoulder that said a bookful about what she thought of him, and went off across the lobby.

"You stuck-up l'le stinker," Thomas said harshly, "I'd like to—"

I grabbed his arm so tight my fingernails must have bitten right into the flesh. He shut up because it hurt him. Caldwell spoke in a steady, level voice:

"You realize this washes you up, Thomas? The fact that you don't have to eat at the dining table on Saturday nights doesn't give you the right to break training in this fashion—to make a public spectacle of yourself. You'll turn in your suit Monday afternoon."

"Gonna squeal, eh?" Thomas said nastily. "Goo' sport, eh? Why, you—" He swayed drunkenly toward Caldwell, but I yanked him back. Caldwell stood very coolly where he was.

"I doubt very much whether you could ever understand anything about this situation, Thomas," he said. "If I were you I'd get out of here while you

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can still navigate." Then he turned on his heel and walked across the lobby to rejoin the girl.

Thomas started to bellow something after him and I kicked him squarely in the shins. "Shut up, you thick-headed louse!" I cracked. "Don't you see you've spilled the beans?"

There were suddenly tears in Thomas' eyes, and his lips began to quiver. I couldn't make out whether that kick had hurt him or whether he was just going sentimentally drunk on me—the sot!

I started dragging him across the lobby, and I wasn't gentle with him either. Somehow I got a kind of satisfaction out of roughing him up a little. This kid could bend iron bars, but I knew I had the Indian sign on him. I pushed him into a cab outside the hotel.

"Aren't you gonna shee me home?" he blubbered. "I don't think I c'n make the grade into my room."

I SLAPPED his chalk-white face hard, and I could see the red mark my hand left. "I don't give a damn whether you make the grade or not. I'm going back to Markle and tell him you've spilled the beans. This little racket is in the soup, my fat-headed friend. *You're through!*"

I slammed the door shut viciously. Then I slipped the driver a fin, told him to get the kid home and help him into his room if necessary. "And don't try any tricks," I told him. "If I find out tomorrow you've rolled him, you'll wish you'd never been born! This guy is a friend of Senator Markle's."

"I get it, boss," the driver grinned, and he pulled away from the curb with State's "human battering ram" looking like a stale plate of lemon jello in the back seat.

I hot-footed it back to the hotel and took the elevator to our suite. Big Jim was at the telephone spilling some mushy stuff to some doll. I guess he saw by my face that something was wrong, because he cut it short and hung up.

"I thought you were taking the kid home," he snapped.

"Your bright boy friend from the wrong side of the railroad tracks has kicked over the apple cart," I said. And I told him what had happened.

Big Jim was scowling and chewing on an unlit cigar.

"I didn't suppose squealing was part of the college man's code of ethics," he said.

"Don't be a sap, Chief," I said. "This fellow Caldwell is captain of the team. He's in a different spot from the rest of the kids—just as responsible as the coach. Thomas made a spectacle of himself, and half the town knows that Caldwell saw him. He'll simply report it to the coach, and Masters will *have* to kick the kid off the squad."

Big Jim was thoughtful for a minute and then picked up the telephone. "This is Senator Markle speaking," he said. "I want to get hold of Mr. Robert Caldwell. He's captain of the State football team and he was in the hotel a few moments ago. If he's still here will you ask him to come up to my suite for a minute."

"You'd better get wise to yourself, Chief," I told him when he hung up. "There's nothing you can say or do that will make things different with that lad. His ethics, his point of view, his whole world are as different from yours as night is from day. You'll only stick your neck out further than you have."

"Thanks for the advice," said Big Jim dryly, "but I think I know how to handle men from any walk of life."

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"It's dollars to doughnuts he won't show up even if he's still here," I said.

But that was a bet I would have lost, because about ten minutes later there was a sharp rap at the door and when I opened it there was young Caldwell. He gave me a sharp look out of his cold blue eyes and walked straight past me into the room.

"You wanted to see me, Senator Markle?" he asked in an icy tone.

BIG JIM turned on his most jovial manner. "Yes, my boy, yes, I did. Come in. Sit down. Make yourself at home."

"Thanks, I'll stand, if you don't mind," said Caldwell frostily. "As a matter of fact, Senator, I have a pretty good idea of why you want to see me, and I might as well tell you now that I think this is going to be a waste of time for both of us."

A kid, maybe, but this Caldwell had the poise of a man of the world twenty years older than he was. Right then I knew I'd been right. All of Big Jim's skill wasn't going to do him much good. But he tried—and you couldn't blame him for that.

"Look here, Caldwell," he said earnestly, "Carey has just told me what happened down in the lobby. The whole thing is most regrettable—particularly since I feel that I am entirely responsible for the whole thing. It was my fault from start to finish, and I don't want to see Thomas' career blasted nor the success of your team jeopardized because of my actions."

"That's a very decent attitude for you to take, Senator," said Caldwell coldly, "but I'm afraid it doesn't cut much ice. Thomas knows what his responsibilities to the college and the team are. He didn't have to drink the liquor you offered him."

"Of course I know that," said Big Jim suavely, "but he's inexperienced—young. And it was thoughtless of me. And, after all, Caldwell, it's a first offense. When you're older you'll realize that we have to be a little more tolerant under such circumstances. And since I feel so definitely to blame I'm asking you to give this boy a second chance."

"I'm sorry, sir. Of course in the long run it's up to Mr. Masters, the coach. But I'll have to report the matter to him and I know what his stand will be. If it had been me, or anyone else on the squad, it would be dealt with severely. I'm afraid that it will be no different in Thomas' case, even though he is a friend of yours and you feel responsible. We have certain rules and regulations, Mr. Markle, and if they are broken the penalty must be paid, regardless of the circumstances."

I saw the muscles ripple under Big Jim's cheeks and his eyes flashed. "That seems a rather puritanical and priggish attitude to me," he said, a little harshly.

Caldwell was as unruffled as a cake of ice. "I'm afraid it makes very little difference how you feel about it, Senator," he said. "This is our problem and one we will have to deal with in our own way."

"But, Caldwell," Big Jim burst out, "you can't—"

"Good night, Senator," said Caldwell, and he walked out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTERS' MISTAKE.

IT was five minutes before Big Jim got out of breath, and in that time he had called Caldwell every name that anyone had ever heard of in every

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language, including the Scandinavian. While he was swearing I tossed off a couple of shots of rye unmolested. When he was all through I sat down, lit a cigarette, and gave him what I thought was the low down.

"If I were you I'd give up the whole show," I said judicially. "It was a swell idea, but it's got off on the wrong foot and I'd just drop it. You can stop payment on the check you gave the kid and call it a day. Thomas may not be such a hot bet, even if you could get him back on the team now—with Caldwell and the other kids against him. Not only that, I had a little chin with Raph Jones of the *Globe* this afternoon and he smelled a nigger in the wood pile. Maybe you better lay off now while the laying off is good!"

"And let that little so-and-so lick me?" demanded Big Jim—only he didn't say "so-and-so." "Where the hell does he get this high and mighty attitude about not giving a guy a second chance? What the hell do I care about his rules and regulations? Thomas is going back on that team, and he's going to be the big shot back of the conference and we're going to cash in on him."

"You're messing around with things you don't know about," I said. "How the hell do you expect to force 'em to take Thomas back? You can't use your backroom methods on college boys!"

"Maybe not," said Big Jim. "We'll sleep on it. In the morning we'll decide just what to do about it."

I knew Big Jim was a pretty sensible guy and I thought that by the next morning he might cool off a bit and see things in a more sensible light. I knew this situation griped him. I knew it got his goat to have, first, Thomas put over a very shrewd deal on him, and then have this kid Caldwell shut the door in his face. But it wasn't like Big Jim to underestimate an opponent. It was because he never did that he always won.

I figured by morning he'd see he was up against something that was simply not related in any way to the kind of game he played, or the life he lived, and that he'd better let it alone.

But one look at him in the morning when he dove into his steak and potatoes at the breakfast table and I knew he was still planning on fighting. Well, it was his funeral, not mine—at least I figured it that way at the time. Me, I was thinking about that girl young Caldwell had had with him the night before and wondering what kind of a life you had to live to meet a girl with a face like that!

After breakfast—around two in the afternoon—Big Jim lit a cigar and let me have it.

"I want you to go over to the college, dig up that flat-headed son of a garbage collector and talk to him like a dutch uncle," he said. "I want you to tell him he's to go to Caldwell and ask for another chance—say he's sorry—and all that. I want him to go to Masters, the coach, with the same line. And I want him to do it all before six o'clock tonight."

"What's going to happen at six o'clock?" I asked him.

"When you get back you'll find out. I want you to stick with Thomas till you know he's seen both Caldwell and Masters. Then come back here."

"Now look, Jim—" I started in.

"Get going," he rapped. "He speaks the same language we do, so it shouldn't be so tough."

What the hell! There was no use talking when he had his mind made up. Mills was out front of the hotel in the car with Goof Hallor asleep beside him on the front seat. They drove me over

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to the State campus without Goof ever waking up, and left me there. After about half an hour of nosing around I found out where Thomas roomed and went up there. Thomas was sitting in a Morris chair by the window when I went in, dressed in a bathrobe, and looking like Hamlet's ghost.

"Gee, I was sick last night," he said unhappily. "I guess I'm not used to that rich kind of food."

"Sure, that's it," I cracked. "The fact that you had about six Martinis and two quarts of champagne had nothing to do with it."

HE gave me a kind of sheepish look. "I guess I had quite a snootful," he said. "I suppose you've come to get that check back from me."

"I don't know why I haven't," I said, "but I haven't." Then I told him what Big Jim's orders were and he didn't like it a little bit.

"Say, I'd rather toss back the five grand than crawl to that young puppy Caldwell," he said.

"Well, you're going to do it, whether you like it or not," I said. "Big Jim's not fooling, and that means you'll be up to your ears in trouble unless you do just what he tells you. And that's no fairy tale."

He beefed and grumbled quite a lot, but I guess he figured that there was nothing to do but obey orders. Pretty soon I had him togged out and we set out across the campus to the fraternity house where Caldwell lived. I didn't show myself because I figured it would be better if Caldwell didn't see me. But Thomas went in and a little later he came out, looking fit to be tied. He didn't have to tell me that Caldwell had told him just where the hell he got off. He found Masters over at the Athletic Association offices. He was with him a lot longer than he'd been with Caldwell, but when he came out he shook his head.

"No cigar," he said grimly. "He'd like to take me back—he needs me—and all that hooey. But I'll just have to take my medicine! The dopes!"

"Okay," I told him. "Now you scram back to your room and don't open your trap to anyone until you hear from me. I don't know just what Big Jim's play is going to be, but I don't want you making any false moves."

"What the hell," he said. "If I'm off the squad I'm not going to be any use to him."

"He thinks he's going to get you back," I said. "Until he's tried everything, you've got to sit tight."

When I got back to the hotel things were happening. There were a couple of waiters setting up tables, and Big Jim was sitting in the corner with a Cheshire cat grin on his face.

"We're having a little cocktail party," he said. The way he said it made me look at him hard.

"Who's coming?" I asked him.

"Oh, just some of the mob," he said, still grinning.

In about half an hour people started to come. Right away it looked like a headache to me, but I couldn't figure it. There were three or four dames that had been on other parties of Jim's—pretty tough mammas.

There were a couple of ward heelers that were working for Jim here in the capital. There was a fellow named Sullivan who drank three cocktails very fast and then tried putting on hats and making funny faces until I was ready to plaster him one.

There was a fellow named Rego I never saw before, who sat in a corner with a cigarette dangling from between his lips, saying nothing to anyone. He

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looked like a hood to me. I was still trying to figure this all out when another guest arrived. It was Masters, the head coach of State. Right away I began to feel the hair rising on the back of my neck. I didn't know what was coming, but I didn't like the look of things.

THIS Masters goes right up to Jim and he has a kind of a nervous smile that I didn't cotton to. I'd spotted him for a foul ball the day before in the locker room.

"Mighty nice of you to ask me up, Senator," he said.

"Glad to have you, old man, glad to have you," said Big Jim heartily. "Cocktail? Make yourself at home."

Masters took a drink and I saw him looking over the dames with a kind of gleam in his eye.

"As a matter of fact I wanted to talk to you about this young chap, Thomas," the Senator said. "He's in a jam, I understand, and it's really my fault."

Masters shrugged. "I know how you feel," he said. "As a matter of fact I'd feel the same way if I were in your boots. If it was only my own judgment I had to follow I'd take him back in a minute. But the boys on the team feel differently about these things. It wouldn't be policy for me to go over their heads. Make for a lack of harmony."

"I understand perfectly," said Big Jim. "We won't say another thing about it."

Presently he handed Masters another glass. At the time I didn't think much about it; but after I realized that, it crossed my mind as funny that he didn't fill the glass Masters already had. Well, Masters tossed off that second cocktail—and five minutes later he fell flat on his face in the middle of the floor!

The girls all screamed with laughter. Thought it was funny as hell. This heel Sullivan puts on what he thinks is a comic act, imitating the nose dive Masters took. But I felt my heart beating a little faster. Nobody passes out on two drinks, and I was sure Masters was stone sober when he came in. Big Jim just looks at him, smiling that enigmatic smile. He nodded at me.

"Perhaps you'd better take our friend into one of the bedrooms," he drawled, "and let him sleep it off."

I took him under the arms and that hard-looking Rego took him by the feet and we carried him into a bedroom. He was dead weight—out like a light. We put him down on the bed, and one of the dames had followed us in and was loosening his collar and tie when I beat it out. This Rego followed me and I saw him go out into the vestibule. When he came back he was carrying a camera and a flashlight jigger. I grabbed Big Jim by the arm.

"Say, there's something screwy about this," I said. "Was there anything in that second drink beside liquor?"

"What do you think?" he said.

"Jim, you're sticking your neck out for the ax," I said. "You can't get away with this kind of a play on that kind of a guy. What's it for, anyhow?"

Jim flicked the ash from his cigar. "When Rego gets through with his camera in there," he said softly, "we're going to have some very interesting pictures—pictures that would get Mr. Masters in awfully wrong if the college authorities should see them. They would cost Masters his job and any other coaching job as long as he lives."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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The most incredible machine, manned by the most terrible Thing, descends from the sky over a mid-western city—seeking what?

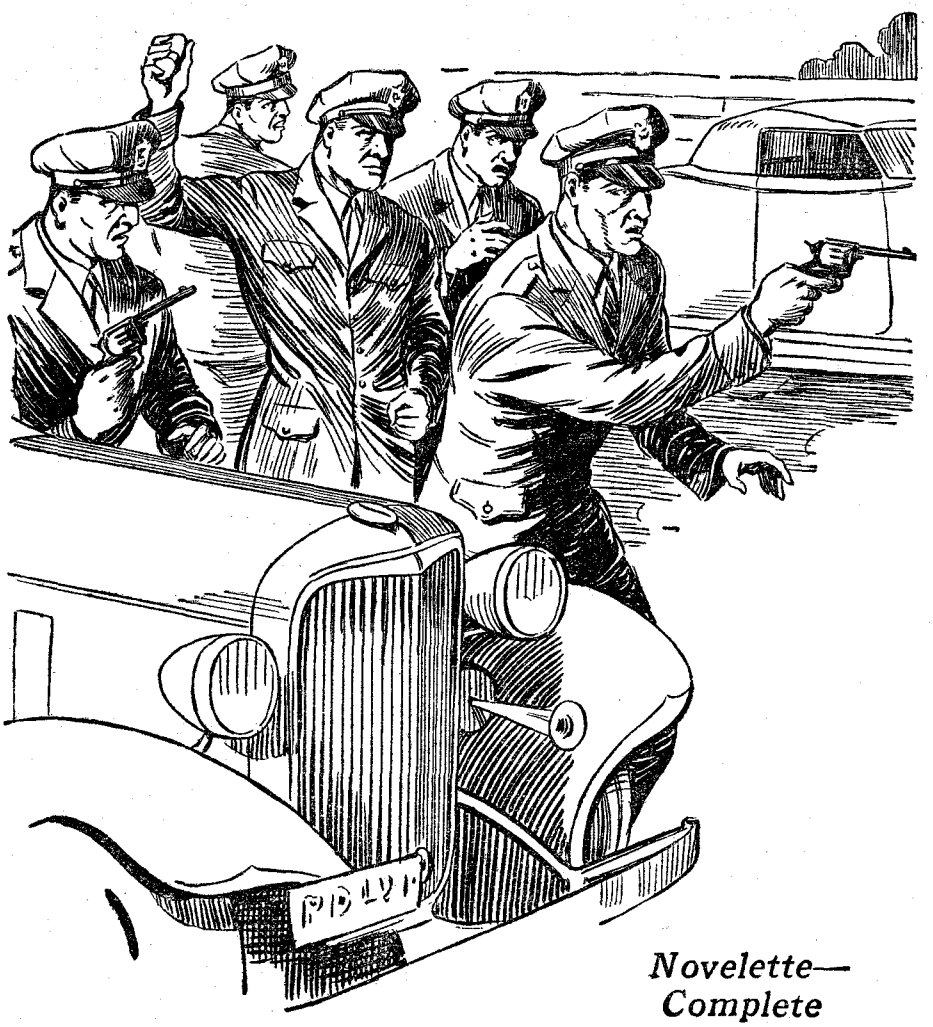
The Monster from Nowhere

By DONALD WANDREI

CHAPTER I.

THE LONE TRAVELER.

TWO days out of New York we met the autumnal equinox which arrived with heavy seas that made the S.S. Mercury roll. The stiff wind and the high waves were sufficient to keep most of the passengers off-deck, though the blow could hardly be called a gale.



Novelette—Complete

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After dinner on the third evening out I walked astern and watched the wake foam away behind us. The deck slanted from side to side with a slow motion that had made other passengers giddy. I enjoyed the rocking, partly because nature left seasickness out of my make-up, and partly because the clouds filled the western sky, mushrooming up as from some vast, mysterious conflagration. Eastward the waves pounded away into darkness, where the slate of the sky met the white-tipped turmoil of ocean. The air was troubled with wild and lonely sounds. Salt spray stung me.

A black, fantastic mass was coming toward them

deck for once was spaciously free of the usual crowd.

We lay somewhere off the coast of Florida, and ought to reach Havana for our first stop on the following day.

The last sullen tip of the sun had set. Red and gray and flame-tipped

I lighted a cigarette. Sparks whipped off on the wind, and the smoke was gone as quickly as it formed.

While I stood there, absorbed in all that sounding, immense turbulence of sky and wind and ocean, I became conscious of another figure. He stood at

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the starboard rail, about twenty feet from me, leaning upon it, and looking northwestward with an air of brooding abstraction. I did not recall having seen him among the passengers; yet I felt immediately that I would like him, because he also seemed to find a kinship in that wilderness of unrest.

He clenched an unlighted pipe between his teeth. He was neatly dressed in a dark suit, but because of the gloom I could only make out that he seemed to be well built, a little on the lean side, and stood a couple of inches short of six feet.

As I watched him he took out a penny box of matches and attempted to light his pipe. The matches flared in the breeze and went out. What prevented him from getting a light, though, was his shaking hands. After a dozen matches he hadn't succeeded once in bringing the flame to the tobacco.

I FISHED a handful of large matches from my pocket and walked over to him.

"Try these," I said. "It's pretty hard to get a light in a wind like this unless you use matches the size of a young tree."

I struck a match for him and cupped my hands about the bowl of his pipe. The tobacco glowed after two matches, and he puffed, at first nervously, then with more composure. I saw, by the brief flashes of light, a face of determination and quiet strength. His mouth was firm, his chin blunt. And yet, for all the strength of his features, his eyes carried the spirit of a perplexed and haunted man.

"Thanks," he said. "Going far?"

"All the way to Buenos Aires. It's a vacation cruise of sorts," I explained and introduced myself. "I'm a writer by profession, but that's something I'm forgetting for the next month. This is purely a pleasure trip."

"I wish I could say the same. I am supposed to be taking a complete rest, but it isn't working out very well." He gave me a once-over in a way that classified him as a trained observer. I had tentatively guessed him a doctor or a psychiatrist, when he added, "My name is Steven R. Chalmer. I am the Commissioner of Public Safety in Woodfield."

"Woodfield—that's in the Midwest, isn't it? I seem to remember reading something about it in the papers recently, though I can't recall just what it was."

"Right." Chalmer inhaled deeply of his pipe. Darkness had settled about us, a darkness oppressive with sound and the damp, wild wind and the roaring of waves. He turned his somber, lead-gray eyes back to me and asked, "What kind of material do you write?"

"Oh, I've tried my hand at about everything," I told him. "I'm more interested in the strange and the weird than anything else. I don't mean the supernatural. I mean the curiosities of nature, the paradoxes of science, the freakish occurrences that cannot be readily explained on the basis of average experience. Like the red snow that fell in Minnesota some years ago, or the Loch Ness monster, if it exists, or the mysterious force that is said to wreck cars on a new road near Berlin. Why do you ask?"

Chalmer countered, "Do you happen to have read any of the books of Charles Fort?"

"Of course," I replied, with sudden interest. "'The Book of the Damned,' 'Lo,' 'Wild Talents,' and 'New

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Lands.' Fascinating reading, in spite of his irritating style, whether you believe his theories or not."

He looked at me in a curious way. "You're the only person I've met who is familiar with the Fort books."

"Do you have a special interest in the weird yourself?"

"I didn't until recently, a few weeks ago, to be exact. See here," he began abruptly, and I knew the instant of his brief pause that he was about to spill over. "I have something on my mind. I've had it on my mind for a month until I got a leave of absence for this cruise. It hasn't helped much so far. Like to listen?"

"I have plenty of matches and cigarettes."

He smiled faintly. "You were right in saying you thought you had read something recently about Woodfield. Could it have been the account of some rather grim murders? Or the disappearance under peculiar circumstances of a young man and woman? Or—"

"I remember now," I interrupted him. "I was much interested at the time. One of the news dispatches mentioned an aircraft of novel type seen in the vicinity. I hunted and hunted, but the stories ended abruptly with the old dodge, the police are investigating and arrests are expected shortly. I haven't seen anything more about it."

"You never will," Chalmer stated in a dry, tired voice.

"I can't quite see you as a Commissioner of Public Safety," I ventured. "Though you talk like a man of excellent education and seem to have a sensitive nature, my guess would have been that you'd be more at home in a laboratory or a classroom than in a police department."

"Not more, but as much. That was a pointed observation," he commented, "because the laboratory and classroom were responsible for my appointment. If it had not been for them —if the old type of police chief had been in charge— But let me go back a little.

"Woodfield has had an unsavory reputation for years. One of its first chiefs of police turned it into a so-called 'protected' town. Out-of-town gangsters and criminals used it as a hide-out, a lay-over place. They reported to the chief of police immediately upon arrival. They were guaranteed freedom from molestation, so long as they did not pull anything in Woodfield.

"They raided neighboring towns, robbed up-state banks, looted and killed elsewhere, but in Woodfield they were safe. Woodfield had one of the cleanest crime records in the country. It was frequently cited as a model community. Actually, it fostered vice upon a large scale because it protected itself at the expense of every other community within a radius of five hundred miles. It became known finally from one end of the country to the other, and the scum of the underworld used it as a center of operations.

"The situation became so bad that a reform movement got under way, especially when the Federal government developed its powerful new crime-fighting agency. The old political machine met defeat. The police department came under the direct control of a new official, the Commissioner of Public Safety.

"Woodfield is a small city of approximately seventy-five thousand population. The State University is situated there. I had been teaching at the university for fifteen years, in the fields of sociology and civics. One day a committee representing business

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men and civic welfare organizations offered to back me for the new position. I suppose they chose me for my complete freedom from political affiliation and lack of contact with the intrenched organization. I accepted because I saw a public duty to perform.

"This," Chalmer murmured reflectively, "is simply background material. It has little to do with the story, except in so far as it explains how I reached office and became vitally concerned with the series of incidents that you read about. It also explains how I happened to be vested with sweeping powers which enabled me to clamp down a comparatively rigid censorship."

"Censorship is hardly in the best tradition of American freedom."

"I agree with you, but there are exceptions to the principle. If a lynch-crazy mob was running wild, would you give them the name and location of your prisoner? If the government was planning an inflationary step, should the news be released in advance to speculators? Complete, constant, and immediate dissemination of news is never wholly to be desired or approved. However, you do not yet know the peculiar circumstances which I believe justified my action . . ."

CHAPTER II.

FLAME IN THE SKY.

"THE suburbs of Woodfield," Chalmer continued, "lie to its south and east. Northward, beginning even within the city limits, stretches a rural area of farmlands, fields and pastures, second-growth timber, lakes and gently rolling hills. A new State highway runs northeast, connecting with upstate towns and cities; but the district due north of Woodfield is not thickly settled, and the old county roads of dirt and macadam suffice for what little traffic there is.

"The largest farm in this area lies about eight miles north of Woodfield. It belongs to the King estate, and consists of a full half-section including greenhouses, truck gardens, a small lake, woods, and several buildings. It used to be a model farm with prize cattle and flower exhibits, but in recent years it has begun to run down. This summer it has been tended only by the caretaker, Kurt Jensen, and his family. I knew him because he had been janitor of one of the campus buildings for many years.

"The end of August brought a hot, dry spell. Day after day saw the thermometer climb to 100. Four days in a row the mercury hit 105 or more. The air was like the draft of a blast furnace. When I lay even in the shade a breeze blew over me like a wind from hell.

"I watered the lawn each night, and each morning the grass was dusty and the soil powder-dry. The chairs and woodwork inside my house were so hot to the touch that I expected them to burst into spontaneous combustion. God knows where that breeze came from. It blew almost steadily, as scorching as the sun.

"On Saturday, August 24, I expected to drive to one of the lake resorts to cool off. I left my office at one o'clock, and found my car an oven. The tar of the pavements was bubbling. Heat-waves shimmered and danced everywhere. It seemed to me a waste of effort to drive for miles through that inferno for the pleasure of frying somewhere else.

"I went home and sat on the porch with an electric fan. In the late after-

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noon haze began to gather, and I thought that perhaps rain would break the spell. Heat-lightning flickered to the north and west.

"I remember that I ate a little pototo salad and cold sausage at six. It was too hot for a full dinner. I sat on the porch again, trying to cool off. About six-thirty, while I was sitting there, I saw a dazzling glare to the north, a glare of such blinding and intolerable brilliance that it hurt my eyes.

"The whole sky was lighted for a long instant with that white-hot glare. Then came a sound, a gigantic sound like the roar of many cataracts, a grinding blast as though a thunderclap kept prolonging itself. The glare died out, and the roaring faded. The phenomenon interested me a good deal, but it was too hot to do anything. I felt certain I had witnessed the fall and explosion of a meteorite.

"About seven-thirty the telephone began ringing. At first I didn't pay any attention to it, but the ringing persisted, and finally I went inside. It was Kurt Jensen.

"'Vill you come oop right ay-vay?' he asked, his accent strong in his excitement. 'Somet'ing has yust happened. It iss a fery strange t'ing.'

"I demurred, while seeking more information, but he kept lapsing into Scandinavian terms that I couldn't follow. He was obviously upset; and when I suggested that a squad car would be sufficient to cope with the emergency, whatever it was, he reeled off a torrent of excited protest. He insisted that I come in person for this very strange thing.

"My curiosity aroused, I finally consented.

"The district around the King estate was out of our jurisdiction, of course; but it lay within the county limits, and the custom had long existed for Woodfield police to settle the extremely rare disturbances which occurred there.

"I saw no reason to take anyone from the force along with me. I am glad that I did not. I drove my own car, and left almost immediately after Jensen's call.

"Twilight was coming on when I crossed the city line. The sun still hung above the horizon, obscured by haze, and glowing red like a monstrous, bloodshot eye. The scorching breeze had subsided. I passed a couple of farm wagons and a few cars, but there was practically no traffic. The trees along the road looked wilted and unreal. The film of dust that covered them turned the leaves a silvery gray; and this in turn became suffused with crimson reflecting the light of the setting sun.

"Dust covered the wild grasses and bushes. It clung to the clover and timothy. It hung upon the parched corn stalks, and the yellowing fields of wheat. There was no green anywhere; only the sun-baked fields and the dusty vegetation.

"About eight o'clock I was driving between a tangle of second-growth wilderness on my right, and a fairly well kept patch of woods on my left which was part of the King farm. I continued until I came to the driveway.

"I had just turned into the driveway when I heard a curious sound. It was like the explosive gasp that precedes a scream, but it ended abruptly while I strained my ears expecting a shriek that did not come. The sound had jangled my nerves. I do not know why. Nor could I tell how far distant was its source—perhaps a hundred

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yards, perhaps five hundred. The air was very still. Then I heard another sound, a crashing, off in the woods. It continued for several seconds, growing fainter, and finally ceased entirely. I stepped on the gas and quickly slid my car to a stop in front of the farmhouse.

"Jensen had told me that his family was in Woodfield for the night, but that he would meet me on the porch of the main building. He was not there. I shouted, but received no answer. Twilight deepened around me, and I became conscious of the peculiar evening hush of lonely places. Strictly speaking, it was not a stillness, for a whippoorwill mourned, and a meadow lark sang an evening song. I heard crickets chirp, then the call of a bobwhite. Yet these things seemed only to call attention to the brooding quiet that prevailed.

"I hurried around the house, without meeting anyone. A path ran along the edge of the woods to my left. I followed the path until it skirted a big boulder. I was hurrying along and I tripped before I could save myself. The object that tripped me was the head of Kurt Jensen. It rolled a foot. The object upon which I fell must have been his body. But only a terrible pulp remained, and the clothing was mingled with flesh, and a great red splash extended for several yards in a swath along the path."

CHAPTER III.

RED TORPEDO.

CHALMER'S pipe had long gone out. He held it clenched by the bowl in one hand as he leaned against the rail. He did not, for the moment, attempt to relight the half-burned dottle. He continued, and his deceptively calm voice affected me strangely against the roaring background of wind and whitecaps.

"I have seen death a number of times, in different guises, but none that produced the shock of finding Jensen's corpse. The eyes were wide open, and it seemed that they still retained a gleam of life and of horror, but while I watched they turned glassy. I will never be sure whether I actually saw the last ebb of his spirit or whether the fading light deceived me.

"The blood upon the ground was still bright and wet. His body lay as warm as if life inhabited it. Death must have come only seconds before my arrival, and his must have been the choked-off gasp that I had heard. But I could not imagine how he had been killed. His neck was sliced as keenly as though a sharp sword had whirled through it. No knife or weapon lay near the corpse.

"Inconceivable pressure must have been applied to his body, but I was at a loss as to how and why. Even if he had fallen from a great height, that gruesome result would not have occurred. The only explanation I could think of was that a giant boa constrictor must have somehow got into the woods. The most casual glance made it plain that every bone had been crushed and the body drained of blood in a matter of seconds only.

"Sickened by what I saw, I inspected the ground for footprints. I did not find any. Yet I distinctly remembered having heard a heavy body crash through the woods. I looked for further signs of a great reptile. Then, indented inch-deep in the dry soil, I found a wedge-shaped groove that entered the woods. There were no footprints. The furrow proceeded in an un-

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broken straight line. The bushes and undergrowth right of the line were slightly broken; but left of the line the growth was heavily damaged, even the tops of bushes several feet away having been crushed."

HE lighted his pipe again.

"I followed this curious trail through the woods. It looked for all the world as if some large and heavy body, off balance, and resting upon a wheel or groove or wedge, had progressed in a straight line, breaking even sturdy young trees that lay in its path. The furrow extended to the road, where it ceased.

"Dusk was falling, but I made my way back to the body and followed the furrow in an effort to find its source. It ran along the path. The path wound past a barn, some fields, the private lake, then skirted a rock-strewn hill. A quarter of a mile from the body I came into a dell behind the hill, and encountered another strange sight.

"For a radius of a hundred yards the ground was blackened and charred. A faint smell of ozone lingered in the air, and recalling the bright flash I had seen in the sky about dinnertime, I thought a bolt of lightning had struck here. But when I bent over to inspect the ground, I found the soil riddled with tiny pock-marks, and emitting a peculiar odor, analogous to burned gunpowder, but with a difference. I cannot explain the difference. If you have ever tried to describe a smell or odor, you know how difficult it is."

"I know," I agreed. "To say that a scent is like roses doesn't convey any impression unless the listener is familiar with roses. It is absolutely impossible to put into words any new, unique smell."

Chalmer nodded. "It was a pungent, irritating, fiery sort of scent— Oh, what's the use? I can't describe it because it wasn't like any smell I'd ever encountered before. But what got me after all was not so much the odor as the huge, weird object that lay against the side of the hill.

"Shaped something like a torpedo, it reminded me of futuristic designs and plans for things like moon-rockets that I've seen pictures of in science magazines. Actually, it bore the appearance of two cones fitted base together. There was a heavy ring around the nose of the torpedo. The cone widened swiftly until, twenty feet from the nose, the craft was fifteen feet high. From this point the body tapered off again, more gradually, for eighty feet.

"There were no wings or vanes, openings or doors, anywhere in that hundred-foot-long projectile. In the tubing around its nose, however, I discovered eight small, blackened orifices, no bigger than pencils; and in the tail of the craft, eight similar vents. Around each of them clung the same musty, acrid odor I had detected in the pock-marked soil. The hull was balanced on its thickest section, and the tail hung seven and a half feet off the ground.

"I cannot convey to you the strangeness of my sensation. Only the rim of the sun lingered above the horizon. The evening hush had deepened. Amidst this heat and stillness and isolation an alien and sinister craft had come to rest. And the unknown cruiser, with no large opening that I could find, was built of or covered entirely with a silvery red metallic substance that glowed weirdly in the last rays of the dying day.

"I took out my penknife and broke its point without making the slightest

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scratch or indentation upon that surface. I rapped it sharply with a stone, and it gave off a deep, resonant, resounding *bong,* as though I had struck a gong of peculiar tonal qualities. The ringing did not die away for a full minute. The air quivered with soft percussions of sound, but I saw no change in the nature of the torpedo, and no one answered the challenge.

"Then the sun set, and in the swiftly gathering darkness I all at once felt afraid. A little wind seemed to play across my scalp. Even in the half-gloom, the fabric or metal, tougher and more impervious than any metal with which I was familiar, continued to glow with a luminous, silvery red luster. I had the distinct and creepy impression that the shell of this thing, or the projectile itself, possessed a secret mysterious life all its own.

"Frankly, I began to walk away. I could see nothing more to be done there. The body of Kurt Jensen must be taken away. I had, however, come to some preliminary conclusions. A number of nations throughout the world have been experimenting with stratoplanes and high-altitude craft of various types, I knew from newspaper accounts. In my belief this was just such a new invention, perhaps being tried out on an experimental trip, and compelled to make a forced landing here, or driven far off its course through some accident.

"It might even be an experiment of our own government, or at least of an inventor in our country. The flash like lightning which I had seen in the late afternoon was probably made by the descent of this very torpedo. Since it had no landing-gear or wings or other external parts, and showed no signs of wreckage, I made the obvious assumption that it relied upon some sort of explosive force, perhaps rockets, to check its fall; and that this force accounted for the burned and pock-marked nature of the soil in the vicinity.

"But there were several hurdles that I could not get over. I thought momentarily that Kurt Jensen had somehow met his death accidentally from the explosive force that checked the torpedo's descent. But he had phoned me *after* the craft landed.

"Again, there was no sign of any opening large enough for even a snake to pass through. If anyone had been inside the torpedo, he could not get out. And if he had gotten out, I was faced with the mystery of how. Anything small enough to emerge through the aft or tail orifices certainly could not have made the heavy crashing I heard in the woods.

"As I reconstructed events, Kurt had seen the torpedo land, or had stumbled across it. He had then telephoned me, and while he awaited my arrival something had distracted him. He had gone to investigate and had met his death at the hands of a killer or by means of a power unknown.

"When I reached the main farmhouse I telephoned to Gostad, chief of detectives, and told him to come out with a photographer and a fingerprint man. Woodfield does not have the large staff of specialists that major cities do, but our men are trained in the all-around handling of murder cases. Even if I could have commanded a squad of experts, I would not have done so.

"I waited until they arrived. The darkness pressed around me. I passed a nervous, uncomfortable twenty minutes, because my imagination kept straying into disturbing paths. I had begun to realize that I might be up

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against something alien to average experience.

"When Gostad and the others came I directed their operations. I explained that I had already thoroughly searched the grounds. I turned their attention to the furrow and swath through the woods, and said that the killer must have escaped in that direction. By then, utter darkness had arrived. In the gloom and trampling around, the men destroyed the odd characteristics of the trail, as I had hoped. The remains of Kurt Jensen were gathered up, and we returned to town. None of the others shared my knowledge of the silvery red hull that lay beyond the lake."

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK HORROR.

As he knocked the soggy tobacco from his pipe, refilled it, and lighted up, Chalmer's hands trembled. His face looked haggard. I made no comment. After puffing strongly, he inhaled deeply of the salt wind, and said:

"This occurred on a Saturday night. I returned to my home well after ten, and soon retired. I was fatigued, but did not sleep. The incidents of the evening drifted through my thoughts over and over again. I tossed around till midnight, and then slipped into a sort of half-slumber.

"I had nightmares. I dreamed of the gleaming long torpedo, queerly balanced upon its thickest section. I saw again the terribly crushed body of Jensen. I fled from shapeless monsters running wild in forests without end. I seldom dream, but my visions that night were of a sort to turn the hair white. This fitful slumber was broken by resonant *bongs* that prolonged themselves in musical thunderclaps through eternity. I struggled to slow wakefulness and became conscious of the telephone ringing insistently.

"My wrist watch showed a little before 6 A.M. I could not imagine why anyone should be calling me at that absurd hour of a Sunday morning and decided it must be a wrong number. I turned over, but the ringing persisted. I finally climbed out of bed.

"I was perhaps two-thirds awake when I reached the phone. A staccato voice came over the wire, 'Murphy speaking, switchboard, Police Headquarters. Commissioner Chalmer? A call for the riot squad, corner of Cherry and Hilton Streets.'

"For a moment I was annoyed.

"'Well,' I complained, 'why waken me at this hour for a routine call?'

"Murphy said, 'You left orders with Chief of Detectives Gostad that you were to be notified immediately of anything unusual that happened. Gostad passed the order on to me. The call is a very queer one. It is to the effect that a large beast of some sort is prowling the district. I have already dispatched the riot squad.'

"That brought me wide awake in a hurry. The corner of Cherry and Hilton streets was the heart of an exclusive residential district about three miles from Police Headquarters, but only a half mile from my residence. Woodfield doesn't boast a radio unit. From the moment the call came in to the moment the riot squad reached the locale, three to five minutes would elapse. I had an even chance of getting there as fast as they did.

"I dressed with a speed that proved disastrous to buttons. I didn't try to do even a presentable job. I only took

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time to snatch my revolver and a small camera before I ran out. I lost a little time starting my car, but less than three minutes had gone when I was on the way. I didn't hear a siren, because one of the first orders I had issued was that the siren should be used only in case of extreme necessity. Too many crooks have gotten away because they could check on police approach by that unmistakable sound.

"The streets were deserted. I saw only one boy delivering newspapers during the half-mile ride. I heard the noise of a car traveling up Cherry Street at high speed. It was the riot squad, arriving just before I did.

"A man in plain clothes was standing by a police call-box. I did not recognize him. He was white-faced, shaking, and stammered when he tried to speak. There were six men armed with rifles, sub-machine guns, revolvers, and tear-gas bombs in the squad. The captain had just started to interrogate the man when I got out of my car.

"'What's going on here? Who are you?' I demanded.

"Captain Dollenbeck answered for the plainclothesman, who seemed unable to get a grip on himself. 'He's an honorary member of the staff. Employed as night watchman around here. The folks in this section mostly go away for the summer, and he sort of looks after things. His name's Reilly.' He turned to Reilly and spoke more roughly. 'Come on, shell out. We ain't got all day to hang around.'

"Reilly gulped and said, 'I never saw nothin' like it. I was makin' the rounds. Just as I got to the corner here I saw it come a-tearin' down the street. I jumped back behind the hedge. I took another look at it. It was all black and slimy like nothin' you ever dreamed of. It was bigger'n an elephant, but it didn't have no legs.

"'It just rolled along. That was when I ducked over to the box and turned in a riot call. Then I ducked back and watched some more. The black devil had got as far as the next corner, tearin' along like — like— Gawd, I don't know what. Then it gave a funny little sort of jerk. It got off the road and slammed up the walk into the Martins' place, that big house down there on the corner. There ain't no one home. I don't know how it got in if it did. It ain't come out yet and I ain't seen it since.'

"Captain Dollenbeck's face was a study as he listened to this extraordinary recital. Rage, anger, and disgust successively swept across his features. His men eyed each other, and one of them openly snickered.

"Old Reilly almost wept when he heard that sound. His nerves must have been pretty well frayed. 'You think I'm drunk!' he burst out. 'Just wait till you see the damn beast yourself! Then you'll laugh—like hell you will! Now there ain't nothin' but—'

"He stopped suddenly, and I thought he was going to faint. We were in a half-circle facing him. His eyes, looking up the street behind us, bulged with terror. He gaped and worked his jaws, but he was beyond speech. We all whirled around. Old Reilly had said there wasn't anything. But there was something.

"I don't know how long I remained in a sort of paralysis. There were eight of us, and we all stood there, simply gaping, while priceless seconds ticked by. We didn't move. We didn't yell. We didn't draw our guns. We didn't do anything. Utter surprise, like seeing a building explode before your eyes, will stop you for a

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second. The unexpected, like opening a closet door and having a corpse fall out on you, will paralyze you for a moment. Many kinds of shock will stun the human system for a brief interval, until the mind adjusts itself to the accident and realizes that there is nothing in the matter that is outside average experience, explainable by coincidence or the juxtaposition of incongruous events.

"But we faced, then, something that never before entered human experience. It had absolutely no relation to any ideas, any knowledge, any concepts, or any material of any sort that I had ever read or imagined. It was so utterly alien to everything I knew that I did not even feel horror in those first tense seconds. I experienced only astonishment, and a sort of wide-eyed, detached curiosity."

CHALMER took a deep, nervous breath. The memory of a tragic occasion affected him more than the occurrence itself, if his words expressed the conviction that his voice carried. When he resumed, it was with a full pipe.

"From the sidewalk gate of the Martin residence, a block away, emerged a black, fantastic, and glistening mass which I will never comprehend. It spun out into the middle of the pavement, and there it paused. It had drifted out as a shapeless cloud, a solid shadow, a coherent body of ink. It seemed to flow, like a detached portion of a Hadean stream. In the street, it writhed and came together. It assumed a new and more sinister form. It stood upright, like an immense cylinder, at first, whirling at a feverish speed. It must have risen at least eight feet high and four thick. The shining black mass, ambiguous, gigantic, began to tilt, until it balanced upon one edge.

"In a flash came to me the explanation of that curious groove I had seen in the woods of the King estate, and the oddly broken bushes. This was the heavy body I had heard crashing through the forest.

"While I still waited in the grip of lethargy, the cylindrical thing ceased its tilting. In a way, it looked like a miniature version of the leaning tower of Pisa. But now its rotation increased and all at once it hurtled toward us, a thunderbolt of malignant power. It was halfway to us before the spell of inertia snapped. Then chaos.

"I remember Reilly stumbling up Hilton Street with a green face and twitching hands. Dollenbeck pumped six bullets at the monster. All were direct hits. It did not even hesitate in its rush. Somebody gasped. Somebody yelled. Somebody swore in a mad, crazy torrent of words.

"Somebody grabbed a sub-machine gun and ran forward. It coughed in a long spurt, and the flashes and fumes were dotted with the thud of slugs smashing home. Ten, thirty, fifty, I don't know how many ploughed into that plunging Juggernaut, without effect. There was no reason for anybody's action. We went by instinct. I leaped for my car and dragged out the camera. I sprung it open and began taking snapshots. The air was full of sound and explosions, gasps and powder fumes.

"The man with the sub-machine gun stood a dozen feet in front of us. Somebody hurled a tear-gas bomb. It burst with a tinkling plop, but the white fumes that eddied around the black mass slowed it not at all, and faded behind as the thing sped on. It uttered no sound, aside from a slight

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whir caused by its friction on air and pavement.

"Then, in all that kaleidoscopic compression of furious developments, there came a new horror. The man with the sub-machine gun had begun to back and side-step. Without warning, and in a motion so instantaneous that the eye could scarcely follow it, a tentacle like the finest of wire lashed out from the onrushing monster and whipped around the neck of the gunner. I cannot conceive of the power behind that long, thin loop. It contracted instantly and completely. The man's head fell to the street. A sheet of black doom shot forward from the thing and enveloped the man's body. Like the tentacle, it contracted, and blood spurted into the air. I knew how Kurt Jensen had met his death.

"The riot squad scattered in all directions. I do not blame them. I suppose I would have fled myself if I hadn't had a kind of conviction that, no matter what I did, this was the end. Or perhaps I was simply too frightened to move. Captain Dollenbeck held his ground. I don't know if he was foolhardy or brave. He had reloaded his revolver. He pressed the trigger as rapidly as he could. I distinctly heard the *wham* of the slugs.

"The thing turned aside at an angle toward us where we stood by the curb. Dollenbeck swung his pistol, and the motion threw him off-center. A bullet ricocheted from a fire hydrant. It struck a spark. The thing stopped dead in its tracks, but the spark had leaped. A blinding, purple flash from the thing stunned me. It hung, poised, for a fraction of a second. The air smelled of ozone and weariness. I remember hearing the *clippety-clop* of a milk wagon's horse somewhere near by. The cylindrical monster toppled slowly forward and hit the pavement with a sort of flat, sucking thud."

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTIVE.

"AGAIN, for a timeless second, we stood spellbound, staring at the inert mass. The noise and shooting must have frightened the horse. In the tense silence that gripped us the wild *clippety-clop* of hooves and the bouncing rattle of the milk wagon came with sharp clarity. In my thoughts, fleetingly, I gave thanks for the hour and the season and the district, the houses that were fortunately closed and shuttered, ther owners away on vacation trips.

"I realized, as I came out of a daze, that I still held the camera. I had taken four snapshots. I had not reached for my pistol. I could not think clearly, under the shock of that unearthly experience. I looked down with awe and loathing at the mass on the pavement. I believed it to be dead. I walked over to it and forced myself to touch it.

"A violent shudder shook me. The substance of the monster felt warm, tingling, and yet metallic. It was as though I had contacted living flesh; yet I behold a formless thing, black, inhuman, inscrutable. You know the feel of quicksilver?"

I nodded silently.

"Imagine, if you can, warm quicksilver that will not dissolve into globules, and that retains extreme cohesive strength in spite of its fluid nature; a metallic mass charged with some sort of radiation, electrical or otherwise. Then you will have some idea of why I shivered when my hand touched it.

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"Reilly had disappeared. One of the police had met a gruesome death. Six of us remained, and I took it for granted my face was just as white as theirs. They looked to me for orders, and while I did not care to go over Captain Dollenbeck's head, it was no time for petty formalities. I detailed one man to summon an ambulance, keep guard over the dead man until it arrived, and drive my car to headquarters.

"Two others held sub-machine guns and tear-gas bombs ready. It is odd how we rely upon weapons of long standing, even when they have failed us.

"The rest of us tried to lift that sinister hulk, and to my great astonishment we succeeded. Ugh! I will never forget the feel of the stuff which composed that alien monster. It came up as if we were lifting a heap of dough. It gave me a queer sensation of extreme weight counterbalanced by some other force. Once, when going through a steel plant, I saw an immense flywheel that I couldn't even budge. An electromagnet was swung over it, and the power turned part way on. I could lift the wheel with ease, but it still gave me the impression of enormous weight. Well, our inert nightmare was of a similar nature.

"The sweat dripped from my face, but I wasn't warm. I quaked in fear, the chilling fear that this monstrous distortion of life would suddenly arise and smite us with hideous doom. I knew of nothing we could do to stop it. I prayed that it was dead, and that its warmth resulted from exposure to the sun, or would gradually ebb away, though certainly it bore no relation to any conceivable life-form that ever existed upon earth.

"Somehow, we piled it into the squad-car. It sagged upon the floor. I stared at it with a confusion of emotion all the way in. It fascinated me, with an almost hypnotic intensity, and yet produced a sort of ecstasy of horror. My hands sweated. I tried to convince myself that its reality and immediate presence removed it from the category of the bizarre or the supernormal. But its nature, its power, its ferocity, its incredible weirdness, only roused in me apprehensions and conjectures of the gloomiest kind. The ride to Police Headquarters proved a nightmare. The only problem I solved concerned the temporary disposal of the captive.

"Police Headquarters adjoins a new Building of Municipal Affairs erected about two years ago. The City Jail comprises a separate unit, linked by underground passages to Police Headquarters, the Court House, and the Building of Municipal Affairs, the four units occupying an entire city block. The City Jail, modern in every respect, contains a group of four subcellar cells for the solitary confinement of dangerous prisoners. These cells are escape-proof. They have heavy steel doors with a small grille through which food can be passed. Another steel door stands at the bottom and at the top of the stairs leading to the cellar. The cellar, in adition to the different mechanical units which operate the building, contains storerooms and detention cells used mainly to sober off drunks overnight.

"We lugged the monster into a subcellar vault. We dumped it upon the floor. It lay there, a mound of gluey black glistening substance, the strangest occupant those cells ever had.

"Then I pledged the men to silence for the time being. We didn't know what we were up against. Anything

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might happen. If the prisoner escaped, we wouldn't have anything tangible to support our explanations. If it didn't revive, we would have the devil of a time trying to tell what had happened. If it did become again as we had first seen it, people could form their own conclusions.

"One factor later turned out to be in our favor. Woodfield has a morning and an evening paper, but only the morning paper publishes a Sunday issue. Its next edition is not run off until 2 A.M. on Monday morning. Thus, while reporters frequent the building on week days, none are on hand during the Sabbath until six o'clock, when the *Morning Courier* man shows up for his copy. We had about twelve hours in which to decide our course.

"I asked Dollenbeck and the others to wait for me in my office. After they left I told the guard in the sub-cellar block to take it easy while I studied our captive through the slide in the cellar door.

"The guard gave me a curious look, but walked off to smoke a cigarette. Hatless, coatless, and in a dither, I suppose I looked as if I myself ought to have been locked up. I tried to figure some plan of action, some preparation for whatever emergency arose. It's hard enough arranging yourself an out for any situation likely to rise in ordinary life. I faced a menace of incalculable resourcefulness. I didn't know its nature. I didn't know its origin. I didn't know anything about it, or what it was, or what it could do. It was beyond experience.

"While I stood looking at it, it stirred, with an uneasy gelatinous motion. I broke out in a cold sweat. I had been afraid that we merely stunned it, and now when it wakened into sluggish activity I had neither defense nor attack ready.

"ALL at once it quivered, as though gathering its energies.

"I yelled at the guard, '*Unlock the doors!*'

"I heard him run, open the lower door, race up the steps.

"The monster began a spinning that accelerated faster and faster until it revolved with the speed and hum of a dynamo. I don't know how swiftly it turned, but it must have been thousands of revolutions per minute. A strong draught of air rushed past me. The black thing, a living Juggernaut, hurled itself against the solid steel door of its cell. The door burst from its hinges with a scream of tearing metal. The next few moments are a blur of pure terror in memory. I fled up the stairs somehow. My lungs burned from the fierce effort. I tore across the cellar and risked a glance over my shoulder.

"The prisoner, having already flowed up out of the sub-cellar, made itself a battering-ram. It crashed into the door of a detention cell, and the door slammed clear across the cell to the wall opposite. I never before saw such terrific driving power as that thing had. It didn't seem to want revenge, or try to injure us, so long as we stayed out of its way. Escape for the moment appeared to be its single goal.

"The cell that it hurled itself into had a small ventilation grille, no more than a foot square, at ground level. Four lashes of fine-spun wire flicked out of the black mass with a twang as of snapping piano-string. They looped around the steel grille, and those inch-thick bars became so much cheese. The whole grille, cleanly

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sliced, fell to the ground. The delicate feelers returned to the main mass. This much I saw before dashing to the first floor and running to a window that overlooked the inner courtyard.

"The thing had assumed a new shape. I could visualize it in the cell below, sliding across the floor, up the wall, and out through the opening it had cleared. It emerged as a gigantic snake, a half-foot thick, flowing out almost endlessly, hundreds of feet of it. In the center of the quadrangle the coil began forming the original mass, which swelled in size visibly and rapidly second by second until it quivered again, a roughly hemispheric mound, glistening in the sunlight with a wetly black sheen.

"I realized with a shock that it was watching me.

"By what means it observed me, I do not know, for it lacked eyes and all other senses and methods of vision as we are accustomed to them. Yet I knew instinctively and definitely that that formless blob focussed attention upon me. I felt a wave of hostility, of malignant, impending doom—and all I did was to snap pictures foolishly. They've been a hobby with me for so long that I take them by habit.

"Then the tension passed, but I thought I detected in its place a quality of surging, triumphal power. It is difficult to speak with precision of such intangibles in reaction and during a crisis of such strangeness. I believe I was the only witness to an astounding manifestation.

"The thing, having assembled itself in a compact mass once more, underwent a violent writhing that lasted scarcely more than a second. It blurred with amazing speed through a shifting focus. Its form and outline changed. There stood before me, perfectly proportioned but upon a giant scale, twelve or fourteen feet high, the parody of man! Nose, fingers, hair, mouth, ears, teeth, everything characteristic of the external body was present in that plastic image; but the eyes were liquid jet, and the teeth gleaming black, and all other parts the same sinister hue.

"And it was quasi-human only in appearance; for its substance had not changed. Half in shadow, half in the early morning sunlight, it towered, watching me with those cold, wet, metallic imitation eyes. The depths of my loathing and horror left me powerless.

"Why the sight should have shaken me so profoundly, and brought me so close to hysteria, I cannot say. Perhaps it was the abominable hue of the thing, or its immense size, or the essential grotesqueness in its attempt to duplicate man.

"Again it t r e m b l e d restlessly through a cycle of new changes; and now there loomed in the quadrangle a huge figure, repellent, infinitely strange and complex, yet possessing a kind of terrible beauty. Hundreds of feet in height, it had become a subtly interlacing pattern of arcs and cubes and spheres, like a skeletal framework or extension of some invisible, otherworld being.

"And yet, amidst all that marvelous complexity, there wove oppressively disturbing tatters and ribbons and tentacles, suggestive of corruption, and swaying with a black, avid hunger.

"Then it came down from the sky, and the nightmarish vision, the many-dimensioned warp, subsided to its original shape. And while I watched, it continued to subside, melting and vanishing before my eyes; and the heap

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dwindled, shrank to smaller and smaller size, as though seeping into the very earth, or as though drawing about itself a mask of invisibility. I don't know how much time elapsed—perhaps ten seconds, perhaps thirty—before it was gone, leaving only the wrecked cells as proof that it had ever existed."

CHAPTER VI.

A COUPLE OF SPECIMENS.

I THOUGHT a flurry of raindrops would drive us below; but Chalmer ignored the shower, and it passed as suddenly as it came. The S.S. Mercury plunged steadily southward. The wind howled, banks of clouds scudded across the sky, and the sea swelled and crashed with incessant roaring. Briefly I discerned a monster that rose from the depths. Its back broke above the surface, but it submerged before I caught more than a glimpse of its ponderous bulk. Chalmer shivered. His eyes stared away into the dark wilderness that had swallowed the sea creature.

Chalmer said: "When the black mass disappeared from the courtyard, I experienced a reaction that left me giddy. I trembled so badly that I clutched the window bars to steady myself. When I did regain a measure of control, instinct rather than logic spurred me. I turned and ran out of the building.

"My car had just arrived, driven by the man left on guard over the body of the murdered policeman. I snatched the ignition key from his hands without a word of explanation. He looked at me queerly. I must have seemed out of my wits. I jumped into the car and tried so anxiously to get under way that I bungled everything. I jammed the gears, stalled the engine, flooded the carburetor, and made a number of other amateurish blunders. I scraped a fender while going out of the ramp, and drove over the curb in turning a corner.

"Then I stepped on the gas. I shot the marker up to seventy. There was almost no traffic. For two miles toward the northern city limits, Center Avenue is a wide, straight thoroughfare. The stop and go signs had begun to operate at 7 A.M. I sailed through them without diminishing speed, horn blaring away. I remember a roadster that slammed to a quick stop with screeching brakes when we almost collided. I swerved and my car swung a crazy arc to the left of a sedan approaching me. Danger didn't matter. The exhilaration of speed, and more speed, helped steady my thoughts.

"I was racing, of course, toward the hundred-foot-long torpedo that had landed upon the King farm. The black thing must have been aboard the reddish hull. There might be more of the entities, dozens of them, but I didn't think so.

"It was plain by now that I had come across a riddle beyond crime and society and human motivation. That peculiar space-ship didn't originate on Earth. The monster bore no relation to life or evolutionary processes as we are familiar with them upon a terrestrial basis. It may have started from a planet of the solar system; or it may traversed the great void of four light-years that separates our system from the nearest star. If this latter conjecture was true, I had before me a vista of such colossal scope as to strain imagination.

"I am not very well versed in astronomy. It is a science that I know

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only in a general way, from a course I took in college and cursory reading since. I do know that the planets of our system have much the same composition, in different stages of development; that the Sun is too incandescent to tolerate life as we know it, and the Moon too frigid, Venus too steaming and dank, Neptune too cold, bleak, and aged.

"Both the astroplane, if I may call it such, and the occupant were of a composition foreign to matter, energy, elements, and life in the earthly sense. Therein lay my dilemma. Two murders had been committed, according to our standards. But how can you accuse something whose nature, system, and origin are unknown for an action it took in self-preservation, upon a planet hostile to its presence? How would you communicate with it, try it, and imprison it? How would you carry out a sentence of death?

"I recalled the changes it had gone through in the quadrangle. What if it had been trying to draw a parallel? Suppose it had first depicted human life by assuming the shape of the two-legged beings it had encountered. Suppose, then, that having given me its concept of humanity, it tried to express its own habitual appearance in the world from which it came? I thought of the eerie forms that it had assumed, but I merely got a headache when I attempted to conceive of such an existence.

"I have called the thing a monster. I said that it frightened and revolted me. But when I tried to comprehend it, to put myself in its place, another disagreeable thought occurred to me. The thing, if it possessed intelligence of an advanced order, probably regarded our life as something horrible, incomprehensible, and enigmatic. Our appearance and characteristics probably astonished it, or scared it, just as much as its presence affected us. In its view we were the monsters.

"Amid all this welter of doubt and perplexity, I was baffled by still another problem. How had the entity managed to vanish so completely before my very eyes? I could not believe that it had seeped into the ground, though such was the impression I got. I once read somewhere, in connection with one of Einstein's theories, as I recall, mention of a possible curvature of light. Perhaps the thing had knowledge that enabled it to bend light rays around itself, in which case it would of course be invisible. At best, this was a far-fetched and rather obscure hypothesis, but I couldn't think of any other explanation. I ought to have guessed the obvious, simple truth. My failure to do so is proof of my muddled state.

"I suppose it took about fifteen minutes for me to cover the distance from Police Headquarters to the King farm. I left my car in front of the main house. Then I followed the winding trail until I came again to the strange, silvery-red torpedo.

"So far as I could tell, no one had visited it, nor had it changed in any respect. It still balanced precariously on the edge of its thickest section. I startled a rabbit into the clearing, but it fled from the reddish hull in great, frightened leaps.

"I had no plans in mind. I hadn't the slightest idea what I'd do if the monster came along. Electricity affected the thing temporarily; but how are you going to carry the bolts of lightning around with you? Heat of the order of incandescence might halt it; but how are you going to carry such flame in your pocket, and if you could,

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what chance would the monster leave you of using it? What's the use of thinking in earthly terms about an invader that lacks any connection with earthly laws? How are you going to destroy something that is indestructible?

"I didn't even have a hunch. I simply reasoned that the monster had arrived in the torpedo, and that sooner or later it would return. I think it was curiosity more than anything else that brought me there. I didn't know what would happen, but I had to be there and find out, even if I got killed in the process. It wasn't bravery, but a need to know.

"About forty feet from where the double-cone-shaped torpedo rested against the hillside, a clump of gooseberry bushes offered some concealment. When I settled there to watch, I found that I had an excellent view of the hull and the path.

"I expected a long vigil, but I doubt whether I had been there a quarter of an hour before I witnessed an extraordinary, a blood-chilling, sight.

"Some hundreds of yards distant there suddenly emerged into view around the path's turn the body of a man, floating face upward a foot from the ground, and borne along as though in the grip of a swiftly running tide. Nothing supported him. He did not move or cry out. I could not determine whether he was unconscious or dead. He floated toward me head-first, hence I could at first make little out of his features or appearance.

"I had hardly recovered from the shock when there followed in his aërial wake the body of a woman, likewise drifting along off the ground, face to the sky and head toward me. The two bodies were not more than twenty feet apart. Silently, mysteriously, supported by some invisible force, and propelled by I knew not what, they drifted toward the silvery-red hull at a faster pace than a man can walk.

"As I watched the uncanny spectacle, I saw that the man was dark-haired and dark-featured, a Latin type. He seemed to be in his late twenties, well dressed, a little above average height. The woman I had seen somewhere before, though I didn't know her name. She had a Nordic kind of beauty, with flaxen-colored hair, blue eyes, and a fair, lovely skin. She was tall, taller than the man, and possessed a lush figure that made me think of pagan goddesses.

"Their features, I now saw as they drew near, bore expressions of repose, in the limpness of unconsciousness rather than the rigidity of death. I might have rushed out to intercept them, save for the fact that the phenomenon of their motion followed so many other eerie events. There in the solitude, the heat, the presence of the queerly shaped torpedo, I felt the physical drag which makes us loath to act when we are confronted by a manifestation that violates reason and experience. I should have brought someone along with me. Heaven knows I was desperate but helpless at that crisis.

"Then, amidst the familiar sounds of nature, I became aware of a thin and insidious rustle, so faint as to be almost inaudible. If you have ever heard the low, ghostly sibilance of a snake gliding, you will know what I mean. Anywhere else the sound would have passed unnoticed; and even here I detected it mainly because my overwrought senses were in a condition to imagine or magnify anything.

"I saw a small black bead, glisten-

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ing moistly in the sunlight, appear beside the silvery-red hull. One moment the area was vacant, then the globule materialized out of nowhere. It grew larger like a balloon being puffed. The bodies drifted with a more languid motion, and finally came to rest, parallel with the ground and poised upon invisible support.

"The tiny, gleaming button expanded to the size of a cowbell, a puffball, a bushel basket. Suddenly I knew the answer. I could not, at my distance, see the truth, but I knew what had happened.

"In the courtyard, when the black mass disappeared while I was looking at it, it didn't seep into the ground or assume a mask of invisibility. It simply attenuated to the thinnest of threads. In the shape of a thin creeper no more than a sixteenth of an inch thick and miles long, it slid away unnoticed across town. Somewhere *en route* it had caught a couple of human beings, perhaps already on the way to outings or to early church services. Still thinner strands then disengaged themselves from the substance of that entity, and paralyzed the man and the young woman. Fine, tough, wire-like loops held them aloft and bore them along.

"The swelling, inky mound had become the size of the original mass, in ticks of time. A tentacle shot out from it. The end of the feeler bulged to the shape of a tear-drop. The extension whipped backward, lashed forward, and the pear-formed tip smote the tail of the torpedo a mighty blow.

"Instantly, a rising clangor swept up from the silvery-red hull. The sound, deep, musical, and sonorous to begin with, rose to the upper registers and passed out of hearing beyond a high, piercing wail.

"The external covering of the hull shivered. It withdrew from the tail. The metal of silvery-red retreated, ran swiftly toward the nose of the craft, where it bunched into a coil, stripping the torpedo of its protection.

"I had a glimpse of the interior.

"Shapes of things and things of shapes. Colors unknown to Earth. Phantasmagoria of devices, machine objects, dial forms, hypermathematical realities. Four-dimensional creations perceived in a three-dimensional world. Living metals, incarnated gases, corridors of time and walls of space. Distortion of matter to concepts and materialization of ideas into static, inert forms. I don't know what I saw. If I were to see again, to study and analyze for years, I might attain a measure of understanding. Or I might not. How can you discard everything you have learned and try to develop a comprehension of a new order of reality?

"The black mass flowed into the ship's interior. It issued numerous creepers which arranged themselves at different devices and in different places. The bodies of the man and the woman followed the drift of the main mass, and came to rest in a receptacle of transparent walls. I realized with something of pity, something of futile rage, that the invader was about to depart, taking with it a couple of specimens of the bizarre form of life which it had discovered upon the planet . . ."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LONG VOYAGE.

"IMPULSE drove me out of hiding, the obscure sort of impulse that makes us act at moments of gravest peril to save other mortals

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from impending doom. I crashed through the gooseberry bushes.

"As I did so, the black entity snapped its pear-shaped attachment against the roll of silvery-reddish metal which had accumulated at the nose of the ship. The flying weight smote with a thud of concussion. Out of inaudibility into the highest range of hearing came a twang of sound that slid down the scale, deepening sonorously and amplifying to an ever lower and louder pitch, until it rolled with the clangor of a heavy gong.

"While that prolonged resonance descended, the silver-red substance quivered, began to creep and slide around the framework of the torpedo, encasing it again. I hadn't advanced ten feet before the projectile was sealed. If the monster saw me, it paid no attention.

"Then the rear conical section of the astroplane tilted downward until it rested upon the bottom of its eighty-foot length. It continued to tilt, the nose rising ever higher in the air, until it hung perpendicular, poised like a gigantic top. The projectile commenced a spinning, slow at first, that accelerated until it hummed from the speed of rotation. The sunlight glistened upon its luminously glowing surface. It deepened in tone from a silver-red hue to a dark blood color.

"Blinding flame discharged from the eight rear orifices with a roaring, shrieking, reverberating explosion of power. The projectile sky-rocketed, vanished instantly at a velocity so great and multiplying that I could not follow its departure. A blast scorched me. I felt a rush of wind sucked into the vacuum created by the take-off. Beating percussions thundered in my ears, but I suppose it was merely the after-effect of the first explosion.

"For a long while I stood there, staring up into the bright sky, until my eyes ached from its glare, and I began imagining I saw radiant flashes. But though I was shaken and exhausted from the night's occurrences, I did not begin to get the real reaction until days later, when I had had time to digest it all, and after my thoughts had commenced sifting the phenomena in their wider implications.

"I watched the papers for a week in the vague hope that I might hear of peculiar happenings elsewhere that would signify the return of the invader. I felt a sense of guilt over not having prevented the thing from taking its captives along. I still do not see how I could have acted effectively, but I was the only person with opportunity to intercede. Yet I have seen and heard nothing further. The projectile is gone. I shall never view it again.

"Somewhere out in the great black voids of space the astroplane is rocketing onward to an unknown goal, or returning to whatever part of the cosmos spawned it. Perhaps it is already there. Perhaps the entity had knowledge of forces and powers that enabled it to warp through space or curve across time. I do not know. But I visualize it traveling down the nights and down the months and down the years upon its colossal Odyssey across the universe. And secretly I respect it, for its fearless courage, its resources, its titanic initiative, its thirst for knowledge, the magnitude of its voyage, and the sufficiency that urged it on, alone for an incalculable period on a journey that must have been beset by perils of unimaginable scope.

"I suppose the thing is as nearly timeless, deathless, and eternal as anything can be in a universe of change. If it is of a metallic nature, as I be-

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lieve, it is nearly indestructible. And if its life is of an electrical kind, or of cosmic energy, I suppose it would never require food in our sense. It could absorb the radiations that are present at all times in all parts of the mathematical universe. It would be beyond fatigue and age, illness and pain, hatred and jealousy, the sorrows and weaknesses of the flesh.

"Is it possible that metallic substances under conditions and laws beyond human experience and in some other part of the cosmos could pass through an evolutionary development that produced life, intelligence, and entities of a kind wholly alien to our thinking? If the two passengers survive their stupendous voyage, what sort of world will they discover, in what dimension of space and what era of time where in the immensity of the cosmos?

"On the basis of what I saw, I have no doubt that the silvery-red projectile can travel at a velocity far in excess of that of light. It must be the fastest thing that ever moved. I dream of it boring through space, hurtling the astronomical voids with suns and stars and galaxies for mileposts. But where journey's end lies, even the passengers may never know; yet who can say that the stranger may not come again somewhere along the distant arches of the future?"

Chalmer's voice broke off, and in a momentary pause he seemed to reach a decision. "Here, take a look at these. There isn't light enough to see by. Study them closely by the night-light at the top of the staircase well." He thrust his hand into a pocket and withdrew an envelope, which I took.

I followed his suggestion. Inside the door, and protected from the wind, I removed a group of eight snapshots, together with the films. The light was none too strong, but I saw enough to make my scalp prickle. My thoughts whirled along macabre channels and unearthly mysteries during the glimpse I had of those weird photographs.

When I opened the door the wind shrilled past. I walked astern with the envelope clutched tightly.

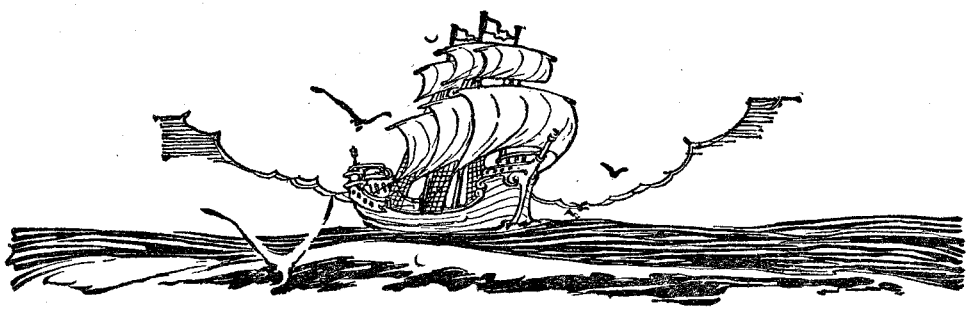
No one was at the rail.

I ran with a sickening premonition. "Chalmer!" I shouted, and again, "*Chalmer!*"

My voice went out in a scream across the tumult of waters and roaring wind.

Then, in the far wake of the ship, I thought I saw a figure upon the foaming crest of a wave, and an arm rise in a gesture of farewell. I leaned over the rail and answered the solitary figure. Deliberately I opened my hand. The white pictures and the dark films streamed away upon the wind, joining in ocean that disappearing arm.

THE END



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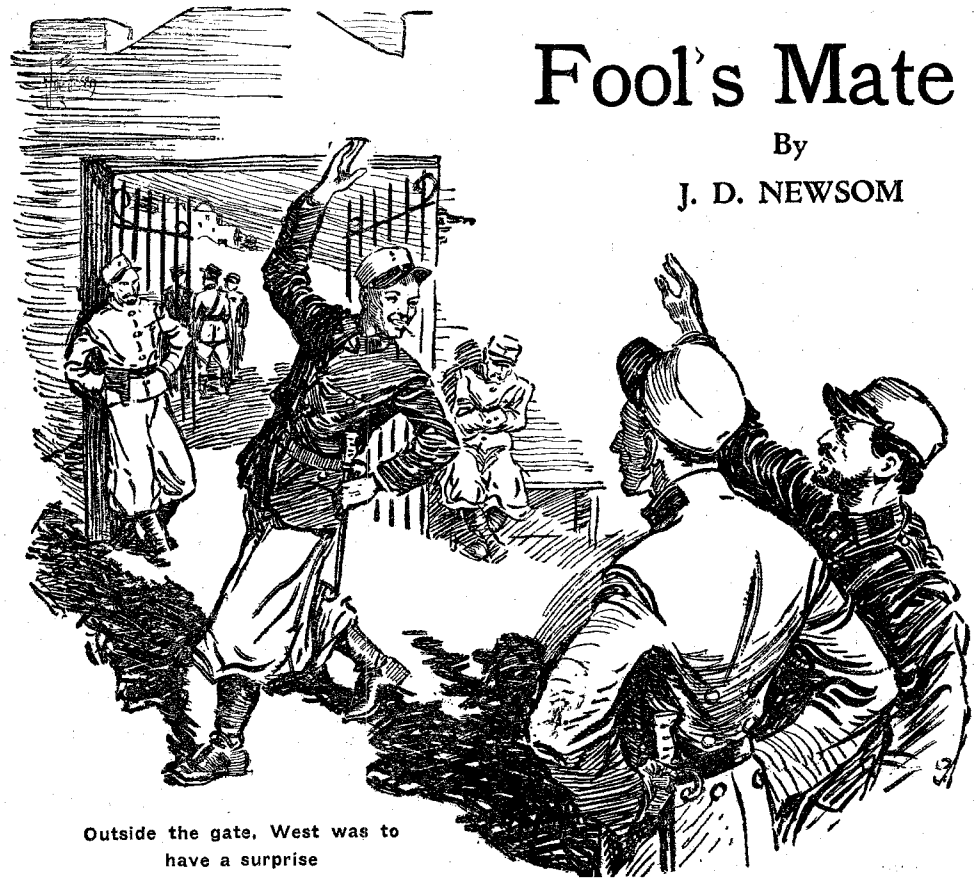
Fool's Mate

By

J. D. NEWSOM



Outside the gate, West was to have a surprise

It was the Legion's code—the more the men rebelled, the worse grew their grim punishment

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LEGIONNAIRE THOMAS WEST, former American air pilot, had found his way into the French Foreign Legion, because he was through as an aviator. A plane crack-up had made him lose his "nerve," and consequently he had lost his job. But his wife had gone on spending money in Paris at a fast clip—so that West finally joined the Legion and told her to get a divorce.

West's friend in the Legion, Robert Milburn, an English actor of the London stage, was in the Legion because of his gin-sodden constitution. Thirtyish and graying, dissipation had led him to a temperamental regard for contracts, managers, and his public, with the result: the Legion.

Henri Toxandre, formerly a newspaper correspondent on the *Gazette Impartiale*, a French paper, whose chief function was ferreting out graft and malfeasance in high places, came to the realization that he knew too much for his continued safe presence in France, and so, to save his hide, he decided to serve under the Tricolor in foreign lands.

It was at the Rendez-Vous des Légionnaires, a drinking resort of the Legion Post, that the foregoing trio was responsible for a free-for-all brawl in this rowdy establishment owned by Señor Lugnatti.

One day when the Legion troops are returning from an exhausting march, West spies his wife, Cornelia, among the watch-

This story began in the Argosy for November 16

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ing crowd of townspeople. In the face of regulations, he shouts a greeting to her; gets a week in solitary; and after his confinement goes to visit her at the Hotel Continental, a place where Legionnaires of ordinary rank are not admitted.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLAN OF ESCAPE.

"I'M a cad," swore West, speaking in her hair. "I ought to be horsewhipped for walking out on you."

"That's not so," she informed him. "It's the other way around and it's all my fault. I deviled you into doing this. Tommy, I never want to go to another nightclub again as long as I live, and I'll never dance with anybody but you . . . and I'll learn to cook. Honest I will . . . and mend things . . . if I have to."

He kissed her. "You're the swellest kid that ever lived," he declared, pushing her away and looking straight into her eyes. "And how! Connie, I'm not good enough for you. I'm a louse. I'll never be jealous again. Yes, I will too. I can't help it."

"I've learned my lesson, Tommy," she assured him, grave and unsmiling. "I've found out what I want. I've grown up. . . ."

"Not you," grinned West. "Never! Connie, we're going places. Quit crying, will you? Your nose is all red."

A cook and two Arab dishwashers had joined the negro in the doorway. They were utterly flabbergasted by the sight of this attractive young lady on terms of the utmost familiarity with a soldier of the second class of the Legion.

The cook was waving his arms, calling out over his shoulder in a loud, sibilant whisper.

"*Venez! Venez voir!* Come and see what is happening out here. It is formidable. What a place for a reunion! My God, what a spot to pick!"

"Let's go up to my room," suggested Connie. "This is just a little too public."

"And smelly," agreed West. "Okay. You lead the way."

Pimples, an Andalusian chambermaid complete with mustaches, and a chocolate-covered valet in a green baize apron were hovering in the corridor in the vicinity of Room 12.

"Soldiers," began Pimples, "are not allowed on the premises. I gave you to understand . . ."

West went straight up to him and rapped him smartly on the chest with his knuckles. He spoke in the rasping barrack-room French of the Legion, which is nothing if not forceful:

"One more word out of you and I'll fish your tonsils out with my bayonet. I mean just that. Call the police—go ahead—and by this time tomorrow night, when my comrades are through with you, your own sainted mother won't recognize you. That's a promise. This lady, as I said, is my wife. I have some private matters to talk over with her. Important private affairs. When I am ready to leave I'll go out the back way and the reputation of your damned rat-run won't be harmed."

That corridor must have seemed very long and very empty and sinister to the clerk. He glanced at the valet and he glanced at the chambermaid, and something told him that it would be unwise to depend upon them for anything more than moral support.

West, he decided, was entitled to the benefit of the doubt. None of the other guests were aware of his presence, and it seemed unlikely that he

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would create a disturbance or use the counterpane to wipe his boots.

The clerk cracked an apologetic smile. "We have to be careful," he explained, "but of course we are always ready to make an exception when . . ."

West was in no mood to listen to explanations.

"We're in a hurry," he broke in. "I must be back in barracks before nine." He followed Connie into the room, closed the door, and jerked it open in time to find Pimples and his two assistants parked on the threshold, listening with bated breath.

"That's right," he jeered. "Go ahead—listen all you like, I should worry. But fetch me a bottle of white wine—iced—and something to eat. Anything. Sardines or sandwiches, and hurry!"

"Haven't had a square meal for a week," he told Connie as the trio scattered. "All you get when you're in solitary is bread and water and some stuff they call soup once a day; dishwater with a piece of potato in it and a piece of goat's meat big as your thumb nail."

CONNIE had had no dinner either, but when the wine and the food were served, their appetite was gone. They had too much to talk about, too many decisions to reach, to bother about the dismal slices of ham and the gray, stringy cold boiled beef the valet set before them.

"I'm hooked and gaffed," grumbled West, prowling about the room. "It's too late now to change anything . . ."

"It's never too late."

He halted by the open window, staring at the rays of light from the street lamps filtering up through the dusty foliage of the plantain trees.

"We've got to face facts. You can't have much money left by this time. You've got to go home. I won't have you stranded out here or in France. You know what they think of Americans. Just let 'em find out you're broke and your name's mud."

She picked up a hunk of dry bread two inches thick and bit off a large piece.

"I'm not going home alone, Tommy. Once is enough. I'll never leave you again. . . ."

"You didn't leave me. I left you. . . ."

So they went all over that again and got nowhere and the seconds ticked away faster and faster.

"Don't you understand!" he protested, "I'm trying to give you a break. You've got to go—alone. I can't get out . . . but suppose I did . . . what then?"

"You could have your pilot's license renewed."

"That's out. I'll never fly again."

"Then you'll find something else to do."

He had never known her so serene and so steadfast, so gentle yet so strong. She made him want to go out and fight and struggle as he had never fought before—for her. It drove him frantic to be cooped up with her in that drab and dusty room four thousand miles from home. . . .

"I don't mind starving with you," she added, smiling into his eyes. "It ought to be lots of fun."

"That settles it," he announced. "There's only one way out: I'll desert."

"Of course," Connie approved calmly. "There is no other way out."

He found it hard to realize that she had once been a wise-cracking little gold digger.

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"How are we off for dough?" he asked. "I've still got about two hundred and fifty bucks."

She had nine hundred dollars.

"It sounds like a lot," said West, "but we'll have to nurse it along. We're not out of the woods yet, kid. If I don't make a clean getaway you know what'll happen, don't you?"

Her face grew hard.

"Your friend Milburn warned me. They'll send you to prison."

"What did that dirty dog have to say? I'll break his neck if . . ."

"You leave his neck alone. He's a peach. He said he was positive you didn't belong in the Foreign Legion and he hoped you'd get out as soon as possible."

WEST'S anger subsided as quickly as it had flared up. "He had no right to throw a scare into you. That's a lousy trick."

"I'm not afraid of the truth, Tommy. I wanted to know . . . the worst. Don't you worry about that Englishman. He's a square-shooter. He wanted to give me an extra hundred pounds just in case. I nearly had hysterics. He's the most offhand person I've ever known. You know how he talks." She gave a shocking parody of Milburn's imperturbable drawl. "'Bally nuisance, what? I mean to say, being short of money and all that sort of thing . . . I rather think, don't you know, if a hundred pounds or so would be of some small use to you.' It didn't seem real, walking down the street with a lot of soldiers and natives all around us, and this Englishman rambling on . . ."

West bent over and looked at her wrist watch.

"That's what we're doing: rambling on. Let's dope this thing out. It's got to be fool proof. First"—he ticked off the items on his finger tips—"I need clothes, a complete outfit. Then . . ."

She crossed the room and flipped open the lid of a suitcase.

"Here you are, old timer. Suits, shirts, socks, shoes. Buttons sewed on tight and everything. I brought along your passport. Anything else?"

He broke into a wide grin.

"You're wonderful. Say, you were pretty darn sure of yourself, weren't you, dragging all that stuff along after I wrote and said . . ."

She put one finger over his lips.

"We won't go into that. I'm sure of myself and I'm sure of you. What next?"

"I can't run the risk of leaving by train or bus. If we told a taxi driver to take us to Oran he'd smell a rat and report us. Connie, you'll have to go to Algiers and hire a car. You're a rich tourist, see? They always fall for that. Drive the car yourself if you can, otherwise drag along a chauffeur. It's going to cost plenty, but they won't think of looking for a deserter in a private car.

"And find out about sailings. Reserve a cabin on the first boat you can get, but not on a French one. Any boat to anywhere. You'll have to hustle. If I hang around here much longer I'll be transferred to an active service battalion.

"So," he stooped over and kissed her, "as soon as everything's squared up come on back in the car and we'll shoot the works. And don't forget to have the passports okayed at the consulate of whatever country we're going to. We don't want to get in a jam at the last second. Can you handle it?"

"There's nothing to it. Tommy, I'd dynamite this whole town and everybody in it to get you back. I've been

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so miserable . . ." She checked herself. "Sorry, old timer. I won't let you down. If you've got to get back to barracks maybe you'd better be on your way. . . ."

CHAPTER IX.

HANDCUFFS.

THE upper stories of the barrack buildings struck by the rays of the setting sun glowed like burnished copper. Down below in the courtyard translucent blue shadows were gathering beneath the olive trees set out in orderly rows.

The evening was hot and still. Vultures wheeled high overhead, black specks against a saffron sky. The orderly sergeant stood just inside the wicket gate, picking his teeth with a match stick. On the bench outside the guardhouse four duty men sat side by side in stolid silence.

Legionnaires in fatigue uniforms of white canvas sauntered across the courtyard toward the canteen where lights were being switched on. Cigarette tips glowed in the gathering dusk.

A bugler stepped out onto the threshold of the guardhouse; the orderly sergeant took the match stick out of his mouth and nodded. A brassy, acrid call ripped the silence asunder. "Defaulters, answer your name!" As the sound echoed and died away a medley of groans, whistles and hoots filled the air, then the defaulters issued from every doorway and converged upon the guardhouse. For a minute there was a tumult of shouted names, "Kanitz, Villiers, Goertner, Hekman . . ." Gradually the noise subsided and the hot stillness closed in again for another half hour.

"I'd like to have one last drink with you fellows," said West, "but I don't think I can make it. I'm due at the hotel at seven sharp. That's when all them high-toned birds feed their faces."

They were walking up and down beneath the row of trees in the center of the courtyard.

"We'll drink your health later on," promised Milburn. "Everything in order, I presume? No loose ends lying around to trip you up?"

"We're sitting pretty. Connie's as smart as a whip. Yes, sir! This time tomorrow night we'll be on board ship." He pitched away his cigarette and lighted another. "We ought to make a clean get-away. I wangled a midnight pass out of old Brankovich, so I won't be reported missing until roll call tomorrow morning. We'll be in Algiers before noon. Nobody's going to look for a doggone deserter at the best joint in town. Connie tells me it's stinking with idle rich."

Toxandre sighed and kicked a stone with the toe of his boot.

"It is terrible to see you go," he declared. "Even now I cannot believe it."

West laughed. "No more can I, but . . ."

Another bugle call rang out. They stopped dead in their tracks. West drew a deep breath.

"Here we go! I'll send you a postcard from Gibraltar."

"I won't shake hands," said Milburn. "It might look suspicious and all that sort of thing. Give my regards to your wife. Good luck to you both."

Toxandre brushed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"I am said. I cannot tell you what your friendship has meant to me. I shall miss you very much."

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"Don't let it throw you," grinned West. "You've still got Poker-Face to work on. Don't let him stray from the straight and narrow. You're good eggs, both of you. Well . . ." He paused awkwardly.

Milburn shuddered. "Don't slop over," he snapped with more emphasis than was his custom. "Get out, you ass. Go! About turn, Legionnaire West. By your left. . . . Forward at a slow walk. Slow!"

"Okay," nodded West. "*Adios!*"

The sergeant at the gate looked him over with a critical eye before letting him through. The road seemed to stretch out for miles. The sidewalk was crowded with an endless stream of people who ambled from side to side and trod on his toes and held him back.

Soldiers, hatless girls, arm in arm, giggling in the twilight, large families spread out from curb to wall, strolling along, killing time while they waited for the beginning of the weekly concert given by the regimental band in the grounds of the officers' club. Arabs in flowing robes with gigantic straw hats perched on top of their turbans added their stately presence to the congestion. Peddlers wandered about hawking lemonade, fly-blown dates and gobbets of fried meat impaled on long skewers which they waved under West's nose as he hurried by.

ABRUPTLY he came abreast of the high palings surrounding the officers' club. On the opposite side of the street the brightly lighted sidewalk café of the Hotel Continental was doing a rushing business.

He forced himself to cross the street at such a leisurely pace that the bumper of a bus with Arabs piled inside and chicken coops roped to the roof missed him by inches. The *gendarme* who was supposed to be supervising traffic cried out angrily:

"Wake up, you slow-witted peasant. You're not clumping about in a cow pasture now, my friend. You are in a big city. Watch out for automobiles or you will wake up in the morgue."

West wondered what that *gendarme* would have said had he been set down at the junction of Forty-second Street and Broadway. But he said nothing. He was all through with *gendarmes.*

Once again the smell of cabbage water and spoiled meat assailed his nostrils as he entered the service door of the hotel. Upstairs, in the corridor, the Andalusian chambermaid gave him an uneasy smile. She was the richer by two hundred francs, a reward for her silence and for helping to carry Connie's bags down to the car drawn up as near as possible to the back door.

There was no one else in sight. West slipped into Room 12. Connie gave him a quick peck in the general neighborhood of his right eye.

"Bill's paid," she said by way of greeting. "I told the watch-charm down at the desk I might be leaving early in the morning. Your clothes are on the bed. I don't think I've overlooked a single thing." Suddenly she giggled. "I bought you a new pair of garters. I felt positively indecent when I asked for them. Now I know I'm married. The salesman called me 'Madame' when I asked for them. And, Tommy, if I hear another word of French as long as I live, I'll go mad."

"You used to like it. I can still hear you parlay-vooing to all the waiters in Paris."

"I'm cured. I'm going to be so glad to get home. . . ."

They talked on in jerky, disjointed

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sentences, scarcely listening to what the other said, because beneath a superficial hardness of manner they were inexpressibly happy and yet sick with fear.

Beyond the four walls of that room, until they set foot on board ship, they would be in a hostile world where disaster might overtake them at any moment.

Neither of them dared face the consequences of a possible failure.

In a quarter of an hour West was ready. He stared at himself in the tarnished mirror over the washstand. "I don't look right," he complained, rubbing the palm of his hand across his close-cropped skull. "If a cop spots my hair cut it'll be just too bad."

"You don't have to take your hat off every time you meet a cop, do you?" retorted Connie. "Stop admiring yourself. You're fishing and you know it. Honey, you look swell. How's that? You look grand. If any woman tries to vamp you on the boat I'll kill her. Now listen: I'm going down to start the car. It's French, of course, and finicky. Give me about five minutes to warm up the engine, then you hop in and we'll be on our way."

"But . . ."

"But nothing. That's what we agreed to do and we're going to stick to it. Wouldn't we be in a sweet mess if we were sitting in the car and the nasty little engine wouldn't turn over and a policeman or somebody came along and recognized you? Tommy, I couldn't bear it. I've had enough."

"All right," he agreed. "You win, but, for the love of Pete, take it easy. . . ."

CLUMSILY he laid a hand on her arm. She looked down at his calloused, grimy fingers, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Five minutes," she repeated in a husky voice. "Don't be in too much of a hurry. We're going a long way, old timer."

She left him, and he stood in the middle of the room, counting the seconds beneath his breath. The regimental band over in the garden of the officers' club suddenly attacked its opening number, the Overture from William Tell, playing with martial ardor notwithstanding the heat.

West scowled. The streets would be crowded. They would have to creep along at a snail's pace until they reached the ramparts. But it was too late to make any changes. He'd have to risk it. . . .

Abruptly he swung the door open. No one in sight, not even the maid. One lamp glowed feebly, lighting up a long jagged crack in the plastered wall. His knees shook as he went down the back steps and came out into the evil-smelling passage. People went by in a steady stream. Beyond them, in the car, he spied Connie's white straw hat. She was looking straight at him. Her left hand held the top of the wheel, her right was on the gear shift. The engine was running smoothly.

He smiled at her as he stepped out of the passage.

Instantly two men bore down upon him. Civilians. Behind them another man, a sergeant of the Legion, shouldered his way through the crowd.

"Legionnaire West . . ." began one of the men.

He walked straight on, his eyes fixed on Connie. A hand came down on his shoulder.

"Oh, no, you don't! You're under arrest!"

The touch of that hand filled him with fury. His fist shot out. It landed

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on the man's jaw with a crack that was heard twenty yards away. The detective tottered backward, tripped over his own broad feet, and fell against a lady of a certain age and unimpeachable respectability who was taking the air on her husband's arm.

She lost her balance and fell on her reticule; the detective fell on her and she let out a scream so piercing that the crowd surged inward as if drawn by a magnet.

But the other plainclothesman and the Sergeant of the Legion paid no attention to the crowd. They were far too busy slugging West, who could not be made to understand that he did not stand a chance. They beat a merry tattoo upon his body with their fists and their feet, but he was impervious to pain. He fought back, trading blow for blow, until their faces were gory and their clothes hung in rags.

The end came unexpectedly. The detective who had fallen across the stout lady's lower limbs picked himself up, leaped upon West's back, and snapped a handcuff on his right wrist.

After that, of course, barring the shouting, it was all over. The sergeant butted West in the stomach; the second detective rapped him over the ear with the barrel of a huge and antiquated revolver. Then, as West's knees began to sag, another steel bracelet closed on his left wrist and he was through.

THE crowd at first had been inclined to jeer at the sergeant and encourage West, mistaking the latter for a respectable, law-abiding citizen at odds with a dirty foreigner. But its attitude underwent a swift change as soon as it beheld the handcuffs and understood that the men it had been calling "brutes of the most despicable," and "enraged assassins," were in reality heroic upholders of law and order.

"*Arrière!* Stand back!" ordered the detectives.

But the good people of Sidi-bel-Abbes were clamoring for vengeance. Some one shouted that the prisoner had knocked down Madame Monestier and had tried to rob her. A deserter of the Legion had tried to steal the good Madame Monestier's handbag! The streets were no longer safe. These thugs did not hesitate to attack women even when they were escorted by their husbands! Monsieur Monestier's blood boiled. Ah, la la! how it boiled when he beheld the odious rascal securely handcuffed, even though he knew perfectly well that West had not touched his wife nor come within six feet of her. She had been knocked down. That sufficed. That was too much.

He dashed forward and smote West's face and the crowd cheered and the next day, on the strength of that manly gesture, his stationery business increased seventeen per cent, which proves, if it proves anything, that it pays to advertise, and that he slaps best who slaps last.

Then a squad of *gendarmes* plowed through the throng, and broke it up, and shooed it away with loud shouts of "*Circulez!*" while West, surrounded by an escort fit for a dictator, was being frog-marched back to barracks in double quick time.

The commotion subsided. Friends of Monsieur and Madame Monestier led them to the café to partake of much needed refreshments, and once again the mellifluous oompahs of the regimental band became audible.

Connie sat quite still, staring at the shadowy doorway where she had seen Tommy's smiling, eager face. She felt

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numb, too numb to move or think, unable to grasp the dreadful fact that he had been beaten senseless and dragged away.

All at once she became aware of a man in khaki hovering near at hand, a dapper young man with a little mustache and large soulful eyes. Gold stripes adorned his cuffs. She stared straight through him. He stepped up to the car and took off his cap. He smiled ingratiatingly.

"A distressing scene, was it not, Mademoiselle?" he remarked. "Is there anything I can do for you?" His smile grew more personal. "I should be enchanted to have the pleasure of . . ."

Whereupon, Connie reached out and struck that dapper young man, struck him with her tightly clenched fist, on the nose, as hard as she could hit.

"You're not going to keep him," said Cornelia, addressing not only the dumbfounded officer, but the whole Foreign Legion, and the French army, and the French nation. "I'll get him out. I'll get him away from you." And, as an afterthought, she added with unladylike venom, "Damn you!"

She slammed the car into gear and pulled away from the curb with a jerk that almost tore the flimsy machine to pieces.

CHAPTER X.

PRIDE IN THE POCKET.

IN theory, and the French love nice, clean-cut theories, the disciplinary code of the Legion makes no allowances for the vagaries of human nature.

Where the Legion is concerned there is no such thing as free will. There is only *The Law*. Line by line, paragraph by paragraph, page by small-type page, until it fills a fat volume, the *Code Militaire* governs the lives of its followers down to the smallest and most irrelevant detail.

It is just. It is hard. It is merciless. It makes no exceptions, it accepts no excuses. It is a straight-jacket into which every Legionnaire is thrust. If he rebels it grows tighter and throttles him, the Legion having no time to waste on misfits. On the other hand, if he submits and accepts its constrictions, he ceases to be aware of it.

This is the theory. It had its inception back in the glamorous Eighteenth Century, when the kings of France, beloved of their faithful people, found it expedient to surround themselves with Swiss Guards and Irish Guards and other foreign mercenaries who, once they had been drilled, bastonadoed and mesmerized into a state of almost complete automatism, could be depended upon to obey orders with the precision of machines.

Their standards of discipline, with variations, govern the present day Foreign Legion, which is used, except in national crises, such as wars to end wars, exclusively in the colonies, for the French people, who have not forgotten the revolution, are not particularly anxious to be shot down again by well trained mercenary troops under the control of self-seeking politicians and generals.

The French, indeed, look upon the Legion with the utmost suspicion, but they are a race of thrifty-minded realists. They tolerate the Legion's existence because colonies, which are so useful in so many ways, are simply teeming with ignorant fanatics who have to be wiped out before the benefits of civilization can be conferred upon their children.

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The wiping out process is often long and costly, and every Legionnaire who folds up with a home-made slug in his guts fills a grave which would otherwise be tenanted by some young French conscript. In a country with a declining birth rate such economics are not to be sneezed at.

So the Legion is allowed to blaze the trail and to guard the dim borders of the French empire from Morocco to Tonkin, wherever peace is uncertain and the guns go off by themselves.

The theorists, of course, are quite right. Without discipline in these remote and insalubrious areas the Legion would crumble to pieces. Discipline there must be. Discipline there is. But its enforcement depends, when all has been said and done, upon individuals each one of whom interprets the *Code Militaire* to suit his own particular tastes, as Corporal Raoul Toxandre discovered much to his chagrin.

THOSE two stripes of green worsted profoundly affected his outlook on life. He was one of those who believed in and worshipped the Letter of the Law. It placed him a step above his fellow men. *He had to be obeyed.* When he gave an order, the full weight of the Legion's law enforcement machinery was behind him to ensure that his order would be obeyed. He had power, not much as yet, but enough to whet his appetite for more.

Consequently, he was shocked and horrified by the disgusting breach of military etiquette which occurred as the direct result of his attempt to improve the morale of Legionnaire Milburn.

Ever since he had been promoted he had been having a lot of trouble with the Englishman. Off duty they were still the closest of friends. Toxandre saw to that. His corporal's pay did not permit him to live in the style to which he had grown accustomed since Milburn had been footing the bills whenever they went to town, and he was far too rational to have any desire to kill the goose that laid such palatable golden eggs.

Nevertheless, he could not help but feel that Milburn did not attach enough importance to their altered relationship. Nothing, of course, could shake Milburn's monumental calm. He was as placid as ever, a trifle bored, very detached and phlegmatic. On parade he obeyed orders in a brisk, soldierly manner which was above reproach, and yet some sixth sense warned Toxandre that Milburn, all the while, was quietly amused by his antics.

Whenever he caught Milburn's fishy stare fixed upon him as he shouted at his squad, he grew hot and flustered and painfully aware that he was not as impressive as he wanted to be.

Milburn, he decided, would have to be chastened, made to appreciate his dependence upon his platoon corporal's good will.

Toxandre was not trying to be vindictive. Far from it. He loved *ce bon* Milburn . . . but when the chief cook at the officers' club informed Captain Fauchon, the mess officer, that he would require the services of two extra dishwashers and a second vegetable man for the series of gala dinners, banquets, teas, and other semi-official petit-fourings scheduled in commemoration of the national holiday, and when this request percolated down and down through the ranks until it reached Corporal Toxandre, he did not stop to consult his roster. He made a bee-line for Milburn although he knew damn well that of all the dirty, sloppy, back-break-

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ing jobs he could wish on any man that of dishwasher at the club was by far and away the worst.

IT meant sixteen hours' work a day at the one time of the year when discipline was relaxed and midnight passes could be had for the asking. Furthermore, it meant taking orders from Chief Cook Sinigaglia, a volcanic genius who was alleged to throw an average of two fits per minute while he was supervising the elaborate meals for which he was famous.

It was rumored that when his temper got out of control he did not hesitate to assault his underlings with the first weapon he could lay hands on, but such incidents were always hushed up simply because he was irreplaceable.

Where he was concerned the *Code Militaire* did not exist. Any man foolhardy enough to have lodged a complaint against Sinigaglia would have brought down upon his head the wrath of Colonel Ballande, who was almost as proud of his chief cook's *chaud-froid de volaille* as he was of his regiment.

"It is regrettable," sighed Toxandre, "but you will have to go. It would not be correct if I favored you. We must obey orders, is it not? You are next for duty, so . . ."

"Perfectly all right, m'dear fellow," declared Milburn. "Perfectly all right, I assure you. In fact . . . very jolly . . . New experience and all that sort of thing. Wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"And remember," urged Toxandre, "the *Chef-Cuisinier* is a man of the most importance. He must be treated with respect. He is every strict. Naturally," he smiled a long suffering smile and shrugged his shoulders, "I do not expect you to call *me* 'Corporal' when there is no one around, although the regulations insist upon it, but with the *Chef-Cuisinier* you will have to watch yourself."

"Really?" drawled Milburn. "Corporal, you're an extraordinary chap. Sometimes I wonder . . . but let that pass. When do I . . . er . . . assume my new functions?"

"This morning. Yes. . . . It is too bad. I was looking forward to having a little beano with you during the holidays. I do not forget my friends. Perhaps I can have you relieved in a day or so. I shall do my best. Sergeant Brankovich never interferes with me. I am sure I can arrange it for you."

This was Milburn's cue to express his gratitude and his belief in Toxandre's ability to rescue him from a life of drudgery. He was too thick skinned, however, to perceive what was expected of him.

"No," he said with intense seriousness. "Cast such thoughts from your mind. We must do our duty, to use a bold and striking metaphor which I'm sure you will appreciate, up to the hilt. I shall be honored to wash dishes for France!"

"Very well," thought Toxandre, watching him saunter away, "I'll teach you to sneer at me, you specimen of an English snob. You drunken mountebank! You'll change your tune after you have stood over a sink, up to your eyebrows in greasy dishwater, for a week! You'll come running to me with your tail between your legs, begging to be relieved."

He was destined to be bitterly disappointed. His disappointment was so great that it almost shattered his faith in the Legion's perfection.

Had the Law been enforced Milburn would have toiled like a coolie while Sinigaglia screamed abuse in his face. But the Law was not enforced.

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It was thrown overboard by the Chief Cook, whose behavior, in this instance, was inexcusable.

Less than fifteen minutes after Milburn reported for duty at the club, he was seated in Sinigaglia's private room, sipping sherry out of the colonel's best Bacarat crystal. And this disgraceful state of affairs was due to the fact that the Chief Cook, before he had been unfortunate enough to stab his wife through the heart in a fit of jealous rage, had lived many years in London, where he had been part owner of a Dean Street restaurant patronized by theatrical folk.

HE recognized Milburn instantly. Rank, precedence, the Military Code, promptly lost all meaning. He was back in Dean Street again, welcoming a favorite guest. Would he, could he allow Milburn to wash dishes? Impossible! Unthinkable! Monstrous! Never!

He would wash the dishes himself if he had to, but Milburn—no!

Tears rolled down his cheeks. Tears of joy. Tears of pity.

"I make a position for you, Mistair Milburn," he announced as the level of the colonel's sherry sank lower and lower in the bottle "Oh, I insist. You . . . of all people . . . in the ranks . . . having to associate with that *racaille!* It is terrible. For me it is nothing, this army, I snap my fingers at it. It is better than a rope around my neck, but you . . . I cannot believe my eyes!"

"I'm enjoying every minute of it," laughed Milburn. "Lots of fun. I made a mess of things at home, Antonio. I was on the down grade."

"You? I don't believe it. You should not be here. Permit me to tell you, you have made a fantastic mistake. Your place is in London."

Milburn shook his head.

"My place is here. It's not as bad as you think. I don't have a thing to bother about."

The Chief Cook fished a large cotton handkerchief from his hip pocket and blew his nose.

"Others you may deceive, but not Antonio Sinigaglia. You are too much of a gentleman to show what you feel, but you cannot hide the truth from me. In there, *hein,*" he smote his chest, "you are sad. What a mistake! What a mistake!"

"Let's talk about the weather," suggested Milburn.

"Too much sun out here," grumbled Sinigaglia. "There is no weather, only night and day. But you wait; I make you comfortable. From now on you are my first assistant. You will take charge of the books, the paper work . . ."

"But can you . . ."

"I can do anything!" swore the Chief Cook. "You will have a desk here. You sleep here. We eat together, if you permit it. *Ecco!* For dinner today, I tell you what; a nice chicken *à la gelée,* and a plain salad. You wait. I show you.

"The hand of Antonio Sinigaglia has not lost its mastery!"

It hadn't. Thereafter Milburn ate as he had never eaten before. Sinigaglia fed him as though he were a Congolese bride being fattened for the wedding ceremony. The choicest wines, the finest liquors were none too good for them.

Between meals Milburn had nothing to do but digest and make a few entries in a thumb-marked ledger while he listened to the Chief Cook's reminiscences.

A full week went by before Toxandre discovered how completely his

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plans for Milburn's spiritual betterment had miscarried.

When he went around to the kitchen door of the officers' club at three o'clock on the afternoon of the fifteenth of July, it was with the expectation of being met by a subdued and chastened Milburn, who would be humbly grateful when he learned that his good old pal Toxandre was about to wangle him out of Purgatory.

THE day before there had been a review, a gymkhana and a sumptuous dinner attended by distinguished visitors. A twelve course meal had been served. According to every known precedent Milburn should have been reduced to a greasy pulp. He was nowhere in sight when Toxandre skipped up the steps and peered into the kitchen. One lone man was slowly mopping the floor.

"Milburn?" he repeated, giving Toxandre a very strange look. "Did you say *Milburn?* Sure, he's here."

"Call him," ordered Toxandre, placing one fist on his hip so that the green "sardines" on his cuff could not be overlooked. "I am the corporal of his squad."

The man, a heavy, slow-witted peasant from somewhere in Middle Europe, folded his hands on the mop handle and rested his chin on his knuckles. Having stared Toxandre up and down half a dozen times, he stuck out his lower lip and said: "That's what *you* think."

"I can dispense with your comments," Toxandre retorted with dignity. "Tell Milburn I want to see him at once. I have a letter for him that came this morning and I want to speak to him about a service matter. It is urgent."

"See here," said the man. "You might as well give me the letter and the message. I can't disturb him now. He . . ."

The hair on the nape of Toxandre's neck began to bristle, and his beard bristled too. His eyes flashed fire.

"You can't disturb him!" he cried. "What is all this nonsense? Stop acting like an imbecile. I don't suppose he is sleeping, is he? Or in conference with the colonel? Fetch him, I tell you. At once! If you don't I'll report you."

"Is that an order?"

"Of course it's an order, you ox!"

"*Bon.* I'll tell him, but don't say I didn't warn you. . . . And you stay outside until I come back. Nobody is allowed in here except us imbeciles, see?"

Toxandre was still spluttering with wrath when the orderly reappeared, dragging his mop.

"This way," he said, jerking his head. "He says come in."

Bile welled up in Corporal Toxandre's throat. This was an insult. As a man, as a friend, as a corporal, he was being insulted and humiliated by this *sale Anglais,* this perfidious Englishman who was so damned superior he could not even come to the door to greet his visitor. It was intolerable!

"No!" thought Toxandre, glaring at the orderly. "I shall not budge. Not one step. He must come to me. This is final!"

"Well?" inquired the man. "What are you waiting for now? Get a move on, and wipe your feet on the mat, Corporal. I just finished cleaning the floor."

Toxandre's good resolutions vanished into thin air. He had some startling news for Milburn, news he could not keep to himself a minute longer than he had to.

He pocketed his pride, wiped his feet

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on the mat and followed the orderly across the kitchen.

CHAPTER XI.

FAIR GAME.

HE was prepared to rebuke Milburn in the strongest possible terms, but the sight that confronted him when he was ushered into a cool and shadowy room was so extraordinary that it took all the wind out of his sails.

Milburn and Chief Cook Sinigaglia, slightly flushed and debonair, were dawdling over the remains of what had been a sublime and epoch-making feast. With all the afternoon before them they were sipping coffee out of eggshell china cups, toying with the stems of their brandy glasses.

A bowl of fruit, each perfect specimen embedded in cotton wool, occupied the center of the table. A whirring electric fan tempered the heat and dispelled the smoke of expensive Havana cigars. In the corner a phonograph, toned down to a whisper, was playing Mozart's D-major Violin Concerto.

A numbness crept over Toxandre. He drew himself up to attention and saluted the Chief Cook, who was also a chief sergeant and a most important man. As he brought his heels together Sinigaglia, sitting with his eyes closed, frowned and said "Sssh!"

Milburn pointed to a chair. Toxandre subsided as though his legs had been kicked from under him. When the music stopped Sinigaglia opened his eyes, stared vaguely at Toxandre, who sat uncomfortably perched on the edge of his chair, and stood up.

"Mozart, *hein?* Magnificent! Now I am going to inspect the pantries. You might check over the silver later on when you are through with this young man. They had a couple of politicians for lunch today. They have no scruples, those people."

"I hope I am not intruding," said Toxandre, endeavoring to make a good impression upon the Chief Cook. "My friend Milburn—"

From one second to the next Sinigaglia became a chief sergeant.

"Who," he demnded, "told you to open your trap? Stand up when you speak to me!" He gave a loud snort. "And you call yourself a corporal. Humph!"

So saying he brushed past Toxandre and very nearly tore the door off its hinges as he slammed it shut.

"Have some coffee," suggested Milburn as the reverberation subsided. "And a cigar or something. How's the world been treating you? Haven't seen you for a deuced long time, what?"

"But," said Toxandre, "but, but . . ."

Milburn pushed a decanter across the table.

"The port is more than fair. Help yourself, won't you? This is a cushy job, you know. Can't thank you enough and all that sort of thing. It's very jolly. In fact, it's tophole. Oh, quite too tophole."

"But this," Toxandre tried again, "what is it? What does it mean?"

Milburn had never been hazier, more amiably noncommittal.

"I wish I could tell you," he drawled, and dismissed the whole matter as of no consequence. "Of course, I don't exercise enough," he went on. "Lucky fellow, I suppose you're still forming fours. You rather enjoy it, don't you? Route marches, and things, and being out in the open

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air, growing hard and resilient. It must be wonderful to be resilient!"

Toxandre tried to smile. The effort was ghastly. He looked as though he had swallowed a mouthful of alum.

"I thought you liked the Legion," he protested. "Surely, you will be pleased to return to the life among your comrades. You used to say . . ."

Milburn cut him short. "My dear fellow, I love the Legion," he cried dramatically. "At this very moment I am practicing those soldierly virtues which we both admire and for which our regiment is famous. Self-sacrifice, devotion to duty, self-abnegation. Be not deceived by appearances! I am on the firing line. My fate is sealed."

"Let us be serious . . ."

"I speak with the utmost seriousness," Milburn assured him. "This is no laughing matter. For the past three days," he leaned forward and lowered his voice to a throaty whisper, as though he had a portentous secret to impart, "I have been able to stave off the inevitable with lashings of bicarbonate of soda. But I am foredoomed.

"Beyond a peradventure, I shall have the honor of dying of acute indigestion, and, without fear of contradiction, I assert that my courage entitles me to a niche in our Hall of Fame, where the memory of the Legion's heroes is piously enshrined. Have another spot of port, won't you?"

HIS flippant attitude aroused Toxandre's resentment. "No, thank you," he said, pursing his lips. "Naturally," he went on, "you realize that this assignment is temporary. That is one reason why I came to see you. I was talking the matter over with Sergeant Brankovich"—this was a lie, but he lied effortlessly—"and he agreed to have you relieved and returned to duty."

"You will have to talk it over with Chief Cook Sinigaglia," said Milburn. "That's another point in the Legion's favor. One does not have to reach decisions. One lives with the insouciance of a butterfly, from day to day. If I am ordered back to duty I shall return to duty. If ordered to stay here, here I shall stay."

Toxandre let the matter drop. He was getting nowhere. Something, he decided, would have to be done about Mister Milburn, who was becoming much too cocksure for his own good and the good of the service. A Legionnaire hobnobbing with a Chief Sergeant. Disgusting! It was degrading! There was no discipline possible under such conditions.

"*Au fait,*" remarked Toxandre, adopting a confidential, man-to-man attitude, "by the way, I have a letter for you. It came this morning. I thought you would be anxious for news, is it not? Letters do not arrive often for you."

Milburn looked so startled as he examined the envelope that Toxandre half-expected him to throw all restraint aside and behave, for once, like a normal, emotional human being. But his expectations were disappointed. Milburn quickly recovered his composure, laid the letter on the table, and covered it with the palm of his hand.

"Read it, read it!" urged Toxandre. "Perhaps it brings you good news."

"Perhaps," agreed Milburn, "but if you don't mind, I think I'll wait a while."

"Have you no curiosity?"

"I am devoured with curiosity, and since the letter itself is probably of no interest whatsoever, I am making the most of it, don't you know. I am giv-

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ing free rein to my fancy. Help yourself to the brandy, won't you?"

Toxandre did not pretend to understand such behavior. Milburn, evidently, was showing off, being very British and superior . . . and absurdly childish.

He gave a polite laugh, just to show that he appreciated the humor of the situation.

"Your self-control is wonderful," he admitted. "I could not resist as you are doing! But while you are waiting, let me tell you something."

He wetted his lips and his eyes sparkled as he prepared to spring his great surprise.

"Something that will interest even you, my cold-blooded friend! Today, at two o'clock as I was coming to visit you, who is it I met, do you imagine? No! You will never guess. I will tell you. You remember the unfortunate West?"

"What the devil are you talking about?" Milburn drawled, cocking a coldly appraising eye upon the corporal.

"ABOUT West," chuckled Toxandre, beginning to thaw out now that he held the center of the stage, "and his wife. She is back in town. I saw her enter the *Rendez-Vous des Légionnaires*. When I see a pretty girl, me, I must find out all about her. It is irresistible. I followed her and questioned that old rascal Lugnatti. My friend," he laid a hot, moist hand on Milburn's wrist, "imagine it: Lugnatti has engaged this ravishing blonde. She is to work for him. It seems that she is an excellent dancer of the taps. And what legs, what divine legs!"

"Damn!" said Milburn, swallowing the contents of his brandy glass at one gulp. "That poor devil! Six months at hard labor . . . By Jove, hard luck, what?"

He had not been allowed to see West or to communicate with him while the latter was awaiting court-martial.

He had had no word from Cornelia. According to the meager scraps of information that had come his way, the manager of the Hotel Continental had denounced West to the authorities and brought about his arrest. But such rumors lacked confirmation. Soldiers of the second class are not in a position to find out anything about the inner workings of the Intelligence Service.

Toxandre nodded his head several times.

"Hard luck—yes. But what will you? He should not have attempted to desert. We must do our duty. That is more important than anything else."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," Milburn said acidly. "A moment ago you mentioned West's wife. Is she . . ."

"She is beautiful," grinned Toxandre. "She will not be lonely for many days. No later than this evening I shall make her acquaintance. Lugnatti has promised to assist me. All is fair in love and war, is it not?"

Milburn's hand shook as he poured himself another drink.

"That girl," he pointed out, "is here for one reason only: because West is in prison. She's stranded, otherwise she would not have taken a job at the *Rendez-Vous*. This is a beastly mess. Can't have her being pawed and so forth by all those louts."

Toxandre winked the wink of a gay boulevardier. Where women were concerned his moral standards were as exalted and clean as those of an alley cat. He placed womankind on a pedestal, a convenient pedestal off which

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they could be toppled without too much exertion. In his estimation, Cornelia West was fair game. If poverty really compelled her to work in a dive such as the *Rendez-Vous* while she awaited West's release, so much the better. West wouldn't be out of prison for months and months. Meanwhile she would welcome the opportunity to make the acquaintance of a sympathetic, well-mannered chap of Corporal Toxandre's caliber.

"Leave everything to me," he chuckled. "I will take care of her and comfort her. Ha ha! She will not be lonely much longer if I have my way. Beauty in distress always appeals to me. Ha ha!"

"Ha!" echoed Milburn. "Quite so. I'd be rather careful if I were you. She's a thoroughbred."

"So I have perceived," nodded Toxandre. "She . . ."

Milburn, who had been growing redder and redder, suddenly gagged. For a minute or more he choked and coughed, then with an abrupt gesture he snatched the envelope off the table and ripped it open.

"Excuse me," he said quickly. "I might as well take a look at this and find out what it's all about."

He read the letter several times, his lips moving as he spelled out each word. A thin smile drew down the corners of his mouth as he folded the letter and slipped it into his pocket.

"Springing phœnixlike from the ashes of a dead and stinking past," he mused aloud. "My word! I must have another drink. Nasty taste in my mouth . . ."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Animals Under Water

MEN make poor fish. Ordinarily, they can stay submerged about forty-five seconds. By deep breathing and by relaxing under water as if asleep, however, this time has been extended to five or six minutes. By breathing pure oxygen it has been further raised to ten or fifteen. Oxygen was used by sprint swimmers at the last Olympic Games.

Pushing unhappy animals under water, an experiment made in France sixty-five years ago, reveals that dogs and cats can stand two to four minutes of submersion, chickens about two minutes. Sea gulls are no better than chickens. Ducks can stay down ten to fifteen minutes and seem to like it. While most animals wear themselves out by struggling, ducks keep quiet. A young seal which the experimenter called "not in very good condition" survived twenty-eight minutes. Beavers are good for only about five. Full-grown rats last only two minutes or so; but a curious feature of the rat is that when new-born it can stay under water nearly half an hour.

Whales seldom drown. How long a whale can survive is not known; some say two hours, some twelve.

—*Delos White.*

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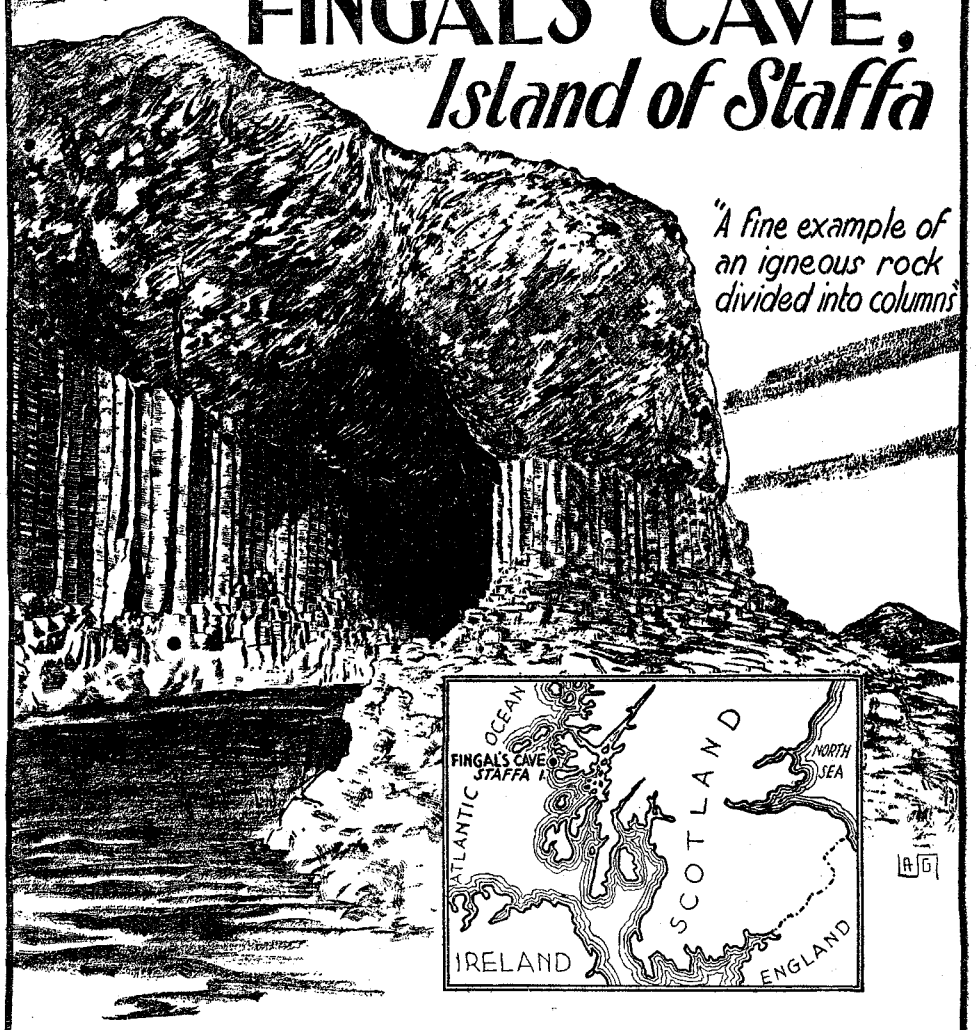
FINGAL'S CAVE, *Island of Staffa*

"A fine example of an igneous rock divided into columns"



OFF the west coast of Scotland, on the North Channel, lies the Island of Staffa. This little island takes its name from "staffa," the Scandinavian equivalent of pillar or staff, because its rock structure is of columnar basalt, exactly like that of the Giant's Causeway (see ARGOSY, July 6, 1935) located across the Channel on the Irish coast. To travelers the chief attraction of Staffa is the marvelous geological formation called Fingal's Cave.

Between two great columns of basalt 66 feet high, which are perfectly shaped as though man had chiseled them, the sea has worn a cavern 42 feet wide and 227 feet long. The floor of this unique chamber with its pendent columns is, of course, the sea. And most beautiful are the color effects of the waves reflected upon the stalactites which form the roof. The sound of these waves, lapping against the walls of the cave and reverberating from the vaulted roof, is hauntingly musical. The cries of innumerable sea birds add to the endless clamor of the waves.

The discoverer of Fingal's Cave is said to have been Sir Joseph Banks, who sailed with Captain Cook on one of his expeditions.

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Novelette—Complete

Man Hunt

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "They Were Fighters," "The Knight in Crimson," etc.

"I'm never mad at anybody. I just arrest guys. I'm a cop," said Olsen of the Hawaii police as he went to work on a baffling death mystery

CHAPTER I.

DEATH IN THE NIGHT.

PUFFY gusts of wind from over the ocean made it uncomfortable under the banyan tree, and guests were moving up to the veranda where they wouldn't have to worry about a shower. The waiters were folding chairs, carrying away tables; and it was in the midst of this confusion that Harry Zimmerman and Phil Stone, who were with separate parties, began to brawl.

Nobody learned afterward just what had started it. Zimmerman, who was part Kanaka, was notoriously a heavy drinker and had a nasty temper. As friends of both men hurried over to where these two stood,

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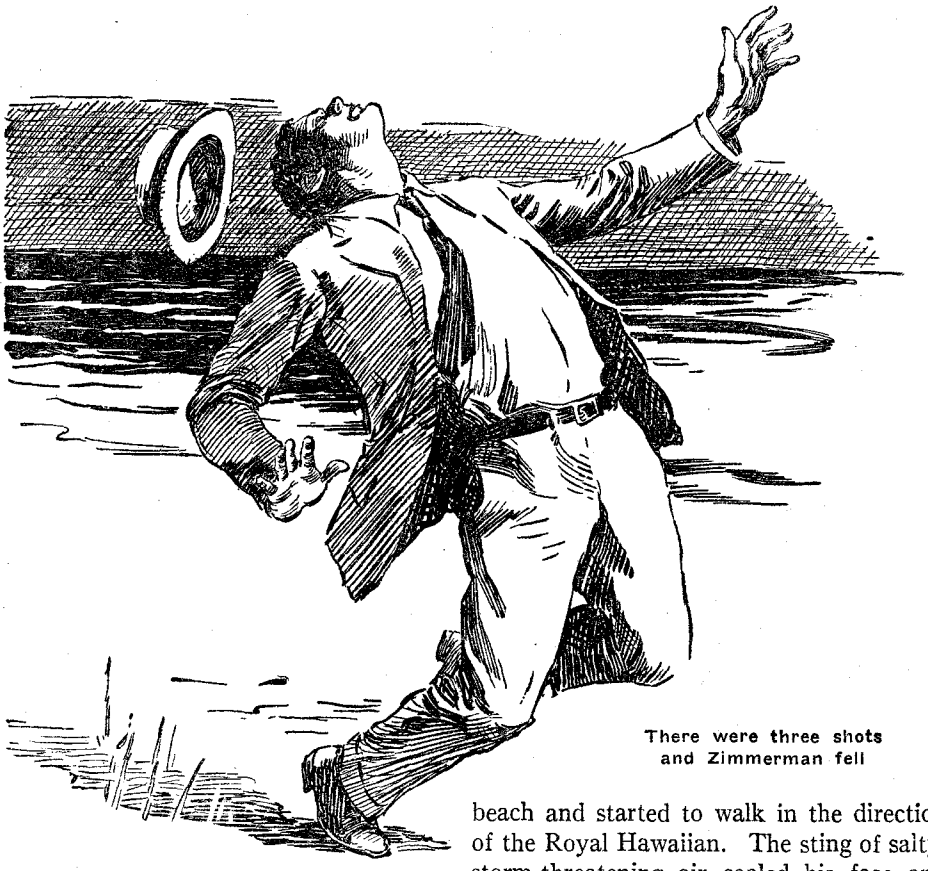

There were three shots and Zimmerman fell

Zimmerman stopped yelling and punched.

The blow was clumsy. It scraped across Phil Stone's mouth, loosening the front teeth and causing blood to flow.

Phil Stone, amazed, furious, would have struck back—but by this time his friends had grabbed him. He struggled, eyes flaming.

"Let me go! I'll kill the rat! I'll kill him!"

But a moment later he quieted. He was naturally a quiet man. Now he permitted his friends to lead him into the hotel, to the men's room, where he washed off the blood.

"You'll stick around, won't you, Phil? Remember you've got a wahini to take care of tonight."

"Yes, I'll stick around. I just want to go out and take a little stroll on the sand, to sort of get hold of myself."

They left him, and he slipped out to the beach and started to walk in the direction of the Royal Hawaiian. The sting of salty, storm-threatening air cooled his face and soothed his nerves. Coco palms rattled importantly overhead, and he could hear, from behind him, the strains of dance music at the Moana. There was no moon, and there were very few stars. Soon it would rain.

Somewhere near the Outrigger Canoe Club he saw Harry Zimmerman, in white linen, walking just ahead of him. He recognized the thick back and thick hips and long arms. Frowning, for he had no wish to meet Zimmerman again, Phil Stone turned. And it was then that the shots were fired.

There were three of them, and they came from Phil's left.

He saw Zimmerman lurch forward, as though he had dug his toes into the sand; and then Zimmerman fell flat on his face.

Phil did not think to look in the direction of the shooting. He had been looking at

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Zimmerman, and instinctively he ran toward him.

Then something hit his elbow. It fell into the sand. Unthinking, he picked it up.

A MINUTE later he was surrounded, and a policeman had snatched the bright little revolver from his hand.

"Over by those hibiscus," Phil yelled, pointing. "I heard the shots! Then somebody threw that thing at me!"

He started for the hibiscus bushes—but he was jerked back.

"Somebody threw it at you, huh?" the policeman said. "Well, let's see what you got in your pockets first, anyway."

"Say, you don't think—"

"I think you better hold still, unless you want me to slap you down."

"Why, you're absolutely crazy!"

"Am I? Well, you had this gun, didn't you? And you were behind this guy, weren't you? And the guy's been shot in the back, hasn't he? So I'm crazy! Wait a minute . . . What's these?"

He took three cartridges from a pocket of Phil Stone's coat. He fitted them, one by one, into a chamber of the revolver.

Somebody in the crowd called: "That's Harry Zimmerman! He and this man had a fight, a little while ago!"

Somebody else called: "This man said he'd kill Zimmerman!"

"Sure, I heard that too!"

"So did I! I heard it!"

The cop whispered, his face close to Phil's: "So I'm crazy?"

A realization of his position came suddenly to Phil Stone, and stunned him, and left him shivering as though with cold. Perhaps, also, his mind was not too clear after the drinks and the fight and the shock of the tragedy.

Anyway, he did the worst thing he could possibly have done. He wrenched himself loose from the policeman and started to run.

The policeman, an enormous Portuguese, fired twice. But the light was poor. And after the crowd started chasing Phil the policeman did not dare to fire again.

Phil heard one of the bullets. It was that close. Bent low, he ran for the hibiscus bushes. He twisted, vaulted a fence, ran up an alley alongside of the club, and a moment later burst out into Kalakaua Avenue. A moment after that he was in his roadster and roaring off in the direction of the city. The policeman, standing spread-legged in the middle of the avenue, emptied his gun after the roadster, and then ran to find a telphone.

The rain began.

IT seemed incredible that Phil Stone should escape. The city of Honolulu is not big except in mileage—not 100,000 population, well scattered, and less than ten per cent of it white. The ships in harbor, and of course the inter-island steamship and airplane companies, were notified promptly. Even ships at sea, for several hundred miles around, were notified. A picture of Phil was obtained somehow, and his description was broadcast.

He was a sugar technician and had only recently come from Manila. A quiet man, he had few acquaintances and only one real friend in Hawaii. This was George Tower, a bachelor and yachtsman.

It was dawn before the police called at Tower's house in Haleiwa, to be told by a Filipino boy that Tower was out alone in his ketch, the Sadie Thompson. Tower had been out all the previous day, the Filipino said. Despite the storm, which according to radio reports was terrific outside the reef, the boy did not seem alarmed for his master's safety. Mr. Tower, he announced with firm, quiet pride, was the most wonderful boatman in the world.

Well, Mr. Tower landed on the windward side of the island, near Kahuku, the following afternoon, in an inflated lifeboat. He was soaked, badly bruised, and exhausted. He'd been caught in the storm, he said, and had tried to ride it out. The Sadie Thompson, he thought, must be lost.

"She was filling pretty badly. I wouldn't have abandoned her if I thought there was a chance in the world of saving her."

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He was dumfounded when they told him about Phil Stone.

And still it seemed incredible that Stone was not found. The Federal Government, the Territorial Government, the City Government of Honolulu, all worked at it. The U. S. Immigration Service co-operated. The customs agents and consular agents in various Pacific seaports likewise co-operated—a description of Phil Stone was cabled to Vancouver, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Wilmington, San Diego, Panama City, and to Sidney, Papeete, Manila, and dozens of other places. But the man wasn't found.

The explanation which finally came to be accepted was that he had somehow contrived to remain hidden in or near Honolulu until he got a chance to stow away, or to buy illegitimate passage, aboard some tramp steamer which would put him off on one of the smaller and less frequented South Sea Islands. It was the only way the thing *could* be explained, men said.

Excepting Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen.

Olsen was no Sherlock Holmes. But he was patient, which is an excellent thing in a sleuth, and he had a highly developed streak of stubbornness. He didn't believe that Phil Stone had escaped from the Hawaiian Islands.

Olsen was a widower and could do what he wished with his vacation. More than three months after the murder he dismounted in front of the manager's house in a far and almost forgotten plantation.

The manager was a thin, garrulous man named MacPherson.

"Sit down. Sit down, lieutenant. Let me get you a drink."

BUT when Olsen brought up the subject of Phil Stone, MacPherson shook his head.

"I thought you fellows had given up that case."

"*I* haven't," Olsen said, and tilted his highball. "This is my vacation, now."

"Busman's holiday, eh? Well now, that's what I call devotion to duty!"

"There's a thousand dollar reward," Olsen explained, gazing resentfully at his empty glass.

"What made you think to come out here, anyway?"

Olsen shrugged. "Stone was a sugar technician. Worked for C. Beers and Company. He'd have to visit their plantations from time to time, naturally, and the managers and overseers would get to know him."

"But we're not a Beers outfit!"

"I know. That's why I came here. The Beers people have plantations on Kauai and Molokai and the Big Island, and even out on Niihau; but they haven't got any here on Maui. Well, Stone wouldn't be likely to go to any place where he might be recognized, would he?"

"I see," said MacPherson.

"Now think hard," begged Olsen. "Have you seen anybody like him at all out here?"

An overseer rode by. He saluted MacPherson and stared with blunt curiosity at Olsen. After he had gone the dust hung in the air for a short while, and the sun smote it gloriously. This was late afternoon.

"No, he's never been here. Only person we ever had out here, except just the plantation employees and a few fishermen, is that author down by the shore there."

Olsen asked quickly: "What author?"

"Fellow named Arthurs. He's writing a book. Sailed in about seven-eight weeks ago."

"*Sailed* in?"

"Yes, he has a little boat. About a 28-footer, I'd say, with a gaff rig. And he certainly knows how to handle her!"

"Where'd he come from?"

"Why, Honolulu, I suppose. From what he says. But he doesn't talk a lot. Stays by himself most of the time, except for this Kanaka, Hoopono, who's got the hut there. He rented the hut from Hoopono, and he lives there with him. Just the two of them. He says he's here to study the natives and all that, for this book he's writing. Local color."

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"Did you ever see him working on this book?"

"Well, no. I don't think I ever did."

"How old would you say he is?"

"Oh, maybe thirty-five or thirty-six."

"Phil Stone," Olsen said, "is thirty-four."

"Oh, this man isn't Phil Stone! Oh, no! Why, if for no other reason, I'd know because it was at least a month after that murder that Arthurs came here."

"In a 28-foot ketch."

"I suppose it's a ketch. I don't know much about boats. This one's called the Clementine."

"Name look as though it had been painted there long?"

"Well, no. The whole boat was painted not so long ago, I'd say."

Olsen sighed.

"I got a strong hunch," he said, "that this man wears a beard."

"Why, yes! As a matter of fact, he does!"

"And it wasn't a very long beard when he first came here?"

"Well, now; that's a fact!"

"Sure," said Olsen.

"But the newspaper pictures of Phil Stone made him out to have dark brown hair, and this man Arthurs is practically a blond! It couldn't be dyed, either, because he goes swimming every day."

"It could be bleached, couldn't it? And the sun would keep it bleached, if he didn't wear a hat." Olsen drew a picture from his pocket. He put a hand over the lower part of it, and showed it to MacPherson.

MacPherson got up swiftly.

"Good Lord, lieutenant! That *is* Arthurs, after all!"

"Yeah, I thought prob'ly it was." Olsen rose. "Suppose you take and show me this hut you were talking about, huh?"

PHIL STONE lay on the edge of a sugar field, up near where the pineapples began. He had been lying there for three hours, prepared at any moment to dodge into the cane. For he had seen the big flatfooted man ride up to MacPherson's house, and later start for the hut on the shore. And he had seen messengers dispatched toward Lahaina and Wailuhu. He could guess the rest.

Above him, fading bluish-purple in the dying sunlight, solemn, serene, dreaming of a day when fire had leapt and seethed inside of her, and black lava had thundered soundlessly down her flanks, rose the might of Mauna Haleakaia.

It was very quiet. They were not working this particular field, and anyway, the labor day was finished now.

When he heard a step, Phil slipped out of sight.

A huge Polynesian, wearing only swimming trunks, his muscles rippling under reddish-brown skin, came slowly along the edge of the cane. When he was opposite Phil he stopped, squatted on his haunches.

Phil whispered: "You're sure nobody followed you?"

"Nobody follow," the Kanaka said, not turning.

"They ask you any questions?"

"Sure. I say I did not see you all day."

"Swell! You're a pal, Hoopono, if there ever was one!"

"What they want you for?"

"They say I killed a man."

"You kill a man?"

Hoopono was interested, but surely not shocked.

"No, I didn't. But they say I did. So I don't want them to catch me. Now listen: You know all that stuff I've been buying? The tins of gasoline and all the cartons of food and so forth?"

The Kanaka nodded.

"Do you think you could stow all that into the boat? I mean, without anybody seeing you?"

"Sure. You sail tonight, Mr. Arthurs?"

"Yes, I sail tonight. At least, I *hope* I do!"

"Bad weather. Storm coming up, outside. Bad for sail."

"I can't help that. I've got to go. You get that stuff aboard without any-

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body seeing you, and then just go off somewhere else and try to forget about me. I'll give you some money—"

"I go with you," Hoopono said simply.

"No, no! It'd only get you in trouble!"

Hoopono shrugged. He rose, dropping a wreath of white ponimoi.

"I make you lei. You go away, you must have lei."

He walked off, moving slowly. Not once had he even glanced in the direction of the hidden man.

Phil Stone waited until it was dark. He hoped desperately that he would be able to get away. The Clementine was his one chance. If they watched that, he was lost. He had provided against this emergency, buying every day more biscuit and tinned food than he needed, and more gasoline. He had plenty of cash in his pocket. It was largely a matter of time. If he did slip away in the Clementine, they'd be looking for him with airplanes in the morning.

Meanwhile he had nine or ten hours, and the Clementine was fast.

There was no moon, there were no stars. The clouds were low and thick. Even before he got to the shore of the little cove where Hoopono had his hut, and where the Clementine was anchored, he could hear the surf pounding on the reef half a mile out.

A SMALL rowboat drifted near the Clementine, but there was nobody in sight. Phil, the ponimoi swinging back and forth across his chest, and with his money in a waterproof bag around his neck, inside his shirt, walked unhesitatingly into the water. For some distance it was only knee-deep. The coral underneath was sharp, treacherous. When the water came up to his waist, he started to swim, silently, keeping his arms under the surface and making no splash.

A few minutes later he was pulling himself over the coaming and into the cockpit. He did not look below; he trusted Hoopono—or, if Hoopono had not been able to stow away those supplies, then he, Phil Stone, did not have time to do so now. He ran up mainsail and jib, and hoisted anchor.

It was low tide; and even at high tide the Clementine cleared the reef only by inches. But there was nothing else to do. He spread all sail. The faster she went, the better.

It was like sliding into a waterfall. Brine stung his face, pounded against the sides, sluiced wildly across the little deck.

For a terrible moment he didn't know whether he was grounding or going through, and being swung landward. The Clementine shivered, and there was a screech of timbers. Then he was clear; and the ketch sprang forward as though somebody had given her a powerful push.

Outside it was even rougher than he had expected. The Clementine was bucky, reluctant to keep her nose into the trouble. Phil reefed most of the jib and all of the mainsail. He strung a knotted line from the sternpost to the top of the cabin door. He started the engine, and fastened a tarpaulin over it—for now the rain was starting.

But the engine was a puny thing at best, a mere fingersnap under the nose of an angry Pacific. The seas were running higher all the time, and the Clementine pig-headedly strove to ride with the storm, landward.

There was a sea anchor in the cabin. It might help. He knew he could get into the cabin, but he was not sure that he would be able to get out again. Once his hands were off the wheel the Clementine might yaw so that the seas would pound against the cabin door.

He lashed the wheel with a little play, and started hand over hand along the knotted line. The wind shrieked in his ears, and spray seared his face.

He was reaching for the door when it was opened from the inside.

In a flash of lightning, the first, Phil saw Hoopono standing there. Then the flash was gone, and the Clementine bucked angrily aport. A sea rushed eagerly toward

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them. Phil kicked the door shut, wrapped his legs around the Kanaka, and grabbed the safety line just as the sea struck him squarely in the back.

Miraculously the line held. The door of the cabin held. They were in a trough, creaming across a quiet space, with another and even higher sea roaring toward them from starboard.

Phil jumped for the wheel.

The Clementine got around to it, and rose to it like a lady. For an instant she shuddered at the crest, standing fairly on end; and then she dipped with a grateful sigh, slithering and hissing her way down one more mountain of water.

Hoopono, flat on the deck, holding the line, shouted:

"I go with you!"

He was grinning, pleased as a child.

Phil yelled: "You damn fool! Get out that sea anchor!"

"That big man find me! He wait for you, here! I have to hit him!"

"You mean to tell me that cop is in the—"

CHAPTER II.

NO BARGAIN.

THE cabin door was opened again, and Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen stood there bracing himself with his elbows. His eyes were groggy, but there was anger in his hard mouth. He held a revolver.

Phil screamed: "*Shut that door!*"

A corner of the engine cover leapt into the air; it whipped and snapped for an instant, and then the whole tarpaulin disappeared with a startled clicking sound. Water slammed upon the engine, which coughed out.

Sick, dizzy, but still stubborn, Matt Olsen started across the deck. His feet were spread wide, and he walked like a man who waded in water.

"Phil Stone, you're under arr—"

Hoopono sprang at him. A gun meant nothing to Hoopono. Fighting, to him, was a matter of fists. It was unbelievable that any other weapon should be used! He had not even thought to take Olsen's revolver when he knocked Olsen out.

The gun cracked once. It was a thin, pipping sound above the howl of the storm.

Hoopono stopped, and his jaw fell. He seemed flabbergasted. Phil sprang toward him, both arms outstretched. But Hoopono teetered against the low rail, and his knees began to buckle, and before Phil could reach him he slid silently overboard. The dark Pacific snatched him away, leaving no trace of him.

Phil screamed: "You dirty, lousy—"

Matt Olsen was death-pale, frightened for perhaps the first time in his life, and about to be sick. He yelled: "What else could I do? The guy tried to—" He fell to his knees, grabbing the rail, as the Clementine tried again to take a sea broadside. Phil sprang for the wheel.

When next Phil had an opportunity to look at the detective, Olsen had his head over the rail. He was completely, hopelessly sick. He was so sick that he neither knew nor cared what was happening around him. His revolver, which he had dropped, slid back and forth across the deck, unnoticed by its owner. Phil, without leaving his place, scooped it up.

It was as easy as that. Phil had read stories, and seen movies, which included ferocious fights for the possession of pistols. Yet here he had taken a detective's gun without even leaving his seat. And the detective didn't know it, or didn't care. The detective, on hands and knees, was crawling for the cabin door.

When Olsen came out of the cabin again it was daylight. The storm had passed. The Clementine slished through the blue water smoothly, calmly, as though nothing ever had been wrong.

Olsen blinked at the man behind the wheel, who was glaring at him. Phil Stone's clothes were stiff, drying. He was hatless. His face and beard were streaked with brine, and his eyes were bloodshot. A lacerated, still-wet wreath of white flowers around his neck rocked back and forth with

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the motion of the boat. The revolver was in his lap.

"I hope you're still good and sick," he said bitterly.

"Thanks," said Olsen. "I am."

Here, to Phil Stone, was a hulk of unthinking muscle—a stolid, unreasoning brute.

OLSEN, after a while, asked: "What happened to the Kanaka?"

"What do you suppose happened to him?"

"Interfering with an officer," Olsen muttered. He held trembling hands to his forehead. "Couldn't you rescue him?"

"If there'd been a chance in a million I would have tried it. The wonder is that you and I are both alive now."

"I'd just as soon not be," Olsen said.

"If I had any sense, I'd shoot you with your own gun and throw you overboard after him."

"If you had any sense," Olsen corrected, "you'd turn this boat right around and we'd go back. I hope you don't think you're going to get away with this? Those guys at the plantation know I was out looking for you, and when I'm missing they'll turn in an alarm."

"Let them."

"You're pretty confident."

"I'm certainly not worried right now."

"Maybe you'll go to sleep," Olsen suggested helpfully.

"And if I do, you'll only have to wake me up again right away. I can tell from just the way you walk around here that you don't know anything about handling a boat. I could tell that by the way you came out of that cabin last night."

"That was that Kanaka's fault. I was waiting in this tub for you, and it was right near shore, and he came along. I started to talk to him, and what did he do but haul off and smack me one! He hit hard, too," Olsen said, rubbing a still-sore jaw.

"That makes me burst into tears."

"Otherwise, I wouldn't be here."

"But being here," Phil pointed out, "you're at my mercy. If I don't handle this boat properly, even now, you're as good as dead. I could knock you overboard right this minute, the way you're standing, if I swung the boom."

Olsen sat down. He wasn't sure what a boom was, but he did not trust anything on this boat.

Phil said: "We might just as well be up in the air, and me a pilot. Even without this pistol, I've got you so you can't do a thing."

"All right. What're you going to do about it? How're you going to keep out of sight of the planes?"

"You'll see."

Olsen stood, bracing his knees against the rail. He surveyed the horizon. He shaded his eyes to do so, for now a pleasant sunlight was flooding the wet, tired Clementine.

"We must be a long ways from land, wherever we are. At least, I can't see any."

"No?"

Big Olsen started across the deck. His eyes were flaming, his fists clenched.

"Say, listen! Gun or no gun, you got to—"

Phil tugged at a sheet, moved the wheel a little. The Clementine, startled, reared aport. Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen waved wild arms, hung for a breathless instant on his right heel, and then crashed against the cabin door. It opened a cut just above his right ear; and blood trickled from this cut, while Olsen stared at the man behind the wheel.

"This boat," Phil said, "is full of little tricks like that. Now go below and fetch me a can of that tinned beef and a bottle of water."

"Where are we going, anyway?"

"You'll find out."

IT was about noon when they found the reef. It had taken Phil three hours to locate, for it was very low. It was jagged coral, shading from dark gray to a dirty cream. In most places it was below the surface, and notable only because

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of the foam. Here and there it cropped up. It was the sort of formation with which this part of the Pacific was strewn. It might not have been there a few months earlier: it might vanish any day. It wasn't charted. Why should it be? It was far from any steamship routes and outside of the territory assigned to the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey.

Besides, no governmental agency could be expected to keep track of such erratic formations. Something volcanic stirred far beneath the bottom of the ocean—and there was a reef. Something stirred again, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, and the reef was gone.

Phil swung the Clementine to starboard, and spread the spinnaker. He sailed directly before the wind now. He was humming something, and smiling a little. Olsen glared at him.

"You don't call this thing an island, do you?"

"It gets to be something like that, pretty soon. Ah! Here we are now! See where it's sticking up there?"

To the detective's landlubberly eye the spot was not clear. But presently they approached it, and even Olsen saw the up-jutting of coral.

"It makes a cave right along here somewhere," Phil explained. "I'll find it pretty soon. You didn't think you could hide right out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, did you?"

And this is what it amounted to—concealment in the center of a vast aquatic wilderness. There was nothing, apparently, but water. Yet they were able to hide.

What's more, they were able to hide their boat, too.

From two sides the coral rose, yearning, aching, toward a not-quite-completed arch. There was a space of perhaps four feet, a slotted roof some eight or ten feet above the mean surface of the water. Phil took the Clementine into it as though she had been a canoe.

"Will—will the thing stay here?"

"It'll stay here as long as I keep it here."

"And what do we do?"

"We stay here with it." He dropped anchor, yawning. Then he turned again to the detective. "Do something useful. Take off your coat and shirt and cover up every one of those chocks and shackles. Those brass dinguses. If that doesn't give you enough stuff, tear your shirt up and make more. I don't mind."

"I don't get this."

"It's better," Phil explained, "to have no metal showing."

"But the top of the mast sticks up through that crack."

"Do you suppose you could see that, from an airplane?"

"So this is the place you spent that month!"

"This is the place. Not elaborate, but sufficient."

"In George Tower's boat! This is the same boat!"

"Detective," Phil said wearily, "you talk too much."

After a while he said: "There's whisky in the cabin. Get me some of it. I want to stay awake."

Twenty minutes later, when they were comfortably settled, and the skies above were offered no sight of them save the top of the mast, bare and unadorned, Phil said:

"So we're just in time, eh?"

They could hear the slapping of waves annoyed at finding this curious natural boathouse. It was a spanking, angry sound, and under it ran the sound of hissing as the water receded, baffled. But through that, now, they were able to hear the low, dull drone of an airplane engine.

Olsen said: "You'll never get away with this!"

"I can try. Come on. We're going below, just in case. And I don't want any funny business from you!"

THEY sat in the silly little cabin all that afternoon. It was nothing but a pair of bunks facing each other, and a pile of stores. They sat on the bunks. Phil Stone held the revolver, cocked.

Four times they heard the plane; or per-

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haps it was a different plane each time.

After a long while Phil said:

"You know, the funny part about all this is that I didn't kill that man Zimmerman after all."

"Do you do barnyard imitations, too?"

"Oh, I don't expect you to believe me. But it happens to be the truth. I had a quarrel with the man, and he socked me, and I was good and sore and yelled something about killing him. But after all, I'd had a few drinks."

"Couldn't we go outside and walk around a little?"

"Whoever did shoot Zimmerman did it from behind those hibiscus bushes. But if there were ever any footprints there, or anything like that, I spoiled them myself when I ran that way."

"Yeah, you ran."

"Which was the dumbest thing I ever did in my life—as I know now. All I could understand then was that somehow everything in the world pointed right straight at me as a murderer. I had the gun in my hand and the barrel was still warm—"

"It was the same gun he'd been killed with, too. The ballistics expert proved that, from the slugs they took out of the stiff."

"I don't doubt it. But anyway, there I was with the gun. And in my pocket the cop found three cartridges. Now you know, detective, it's a funny thing about those cartridges. I'm perfectly sure they weren't there an hour before, when I was fumbling through all my pockets looking for a match."

"The view from here," Olsen said, looking around the cabin, "is lousy. I bet that guy up in that plane has got something a hell of a sight nicer to look at."

"So it stands to reason that they must have been put there by somebody *after I'd had that scrap with Zimmerman*. Because nobody knew I was going to have that scrap—it was a sheerly fortuitious occurrence."

"For a murderer, you certainly use big words."

"I've been thinking a lot about that night since. As a man will, naturally, who's innocent."

"Who's what?"

"And the only thing I can figure is that some one of the men who grabbed me when I started to swing on Harry Zimmerman—some one of those fellows must have put those cartridges there."

Olsen stretched out in his bunk, pretending to go to sleep. But Phil Stone was earnest, leaning forward.

"There were four fellows. And every one of them went to the men's room with me afterward. It might have been done there. It must have been done by one of those four. A friend of mine is investigating them right now. Or was, a little while ago."

"Sure. Your pal George Tower. I knew he was lying. I wanted to go to work on that Filipino kid that told us Tower'd been out sailing all day. I wanted to give him the business. But they wouldn't let me."

Phil stared at him in disgust.

"Don't you ever work a thing out in your mind first? Don't you ever do a little thinking, before you start hitting people?"

"You hit people," Olsen said dreamily, "and then they tell you the truth. And so you don't *have* to do anything."

He seemed to go to sleep.

Phil sat staring at him. They were very close, on the two bunks, and the muzzle of the revolver was not more than a few inches from Olsen's side. Above, and far away, an airplane drowsed itself into nothingness.

Phil shifted.

"Now here's the point, detective. I didn't kill Harry Zimmerman, and I'm damned if I'll hang for it."

Olsen did not stir, did not seem to hear.

"I'M going to devote the rest of my life to proving that I didn't kill him. Somebody will do the investigating for me here, while I'm somewhere else. Naturally I can't stick around Waikiki."

"Tower," murmured Olsen, like a man talking in his sleep.

"But I've got to get safe first. I'm going to get to the mainland. I can't do that if you report that you've seen me."

He leaned closer to Olsen.

"If you'll give me your word, detective,

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that you won't report anything about having seen me for at least ten days—ten days after we reach land—then I'll take you back."

Olsen didn't move, didn't open his eyes.

"Is that clear? I'm trusting you a hell of a sight more than you'd be trusting me. I'm taking your word for it that you won't turn me in for at least ten days. That's all the time I ask."

Olsen said abruptly, without opening his eyes: "What do you think cops are?"

"I think cops are human beings. I don't like you, detective. I don't like you worth a damn. But I'm willing to take your word for something which happens to mean my life to me. And if it comes to that, it means your life to you too. Because if you won't agree I'll just sail off and leave you here. I mean it!"

"That wouldn't do you any good."

Phil whispered: "It wouldn't do *you* any good either."

Olsen lay there, not moving, his eyes closed. There was no expression on his face. Phil Stone watched him.

After a long while Phil asked: "Well?"

The far, humming sound faded. Very soon, with that astounding swiftness known in the tropics, and nowhere else in the world, night would come.

"You're crazy," Olsen said. "I'm not going around making bargains with guys that are wanted by the law. There's a warrant out for you. And don't forget I'm a cop."

"I thought that since it was a matter of your life—"

"Well, no matter what you thought, you thought wrong!"

"All right." Phil rose. "Then haul all these food cartons ashore—such as the shore is. All except the ones I'm sticking under the bunk here." He opened the cabin door. "And may you have a pleasant stay!"

Olsen muttered: "Somebody'll see me. Somebody'll find me."

"I don't know what makes you think that. The Navy or the Army, whichever it is, must be through looking for us around here by this time. Come on, snap into it! I've got a long ways to sail tonight."

WHEN finally Phil Stone weighed anchor, the Clementine, eager as a leashed dog, started out from under the coral roof. Free of that shadow, she was bathed in moonlight. The Pacific was utterly calm.

Olsen sat cross-legged, surrounded by biscuit boxes, tins of food, bottles of water. For all his name, Olsen was no blond. His hair was iron-gray and very stiff, and he had a stiff, iron-gray mustache, and now, in the moonlight, with his gray seersucker suit and his square, stern face, he looked rather handsome, even distinguished.

"One thing I wish you'd tell me," Phil called. "It's a cinch that Harry Zimmerman must have been mixed up with some sort of crooked business. He was nothing but a bus driver until a little while ago, when he blossomed forth with a lot of money. What did he do? Peddle dope?"

"Japs," said Olsen.

"Oh . . . Alien smuggling?"

"That's it. The Federals were working on it, and so were we. We were getting pretty close to him. He drank too much. We'd have got him soon—if you hadn't come along and murdered him."

"I didn't murder him," Phil said dispassionately. He brought the Clementine about. She began to move away. "Last chance," he called. "Do I get ten days' grace, or do you stay here?"

"You," said Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen, "can go straight to hell!"

AS dawn was spreading, Phil raised Cape Kalaau, on the eastern tip of Molokai. He was dangerously close to the traveled lanes now. He found a little cove, maneuvered the Clementine under some overhanging foliage, dropped anchor, and instantly fell into a deep sleep. He did not start forth again until night, and then he sailed without running lights. By morning he was off Cape Makapu, just outside the reef.

Now his problem was to get rid of the

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ketch, so that under no circumstances would his friend George Tower get into trouble as an accessory after the fact. The Clementine must go. Found later, it would be possible to prove that she was the former Sadie Thompson.

But it was fitting that the Clementine should die like a lady. Phil took in every inch of sail, trimmed her, put her in order, coiled the halliards, cleaned the deck. A grand old boat, the Clementine. She had taken all the Pacific could give, and still she was ready for more.

He used a fire ax on her deck planking just abaft the auxiliary. And presently, his shoes tied to his belt, his waterproof money bag around his neck, he dived over the side. The Clementine was filling rapidly, the weight of her engine dragging her down. A pity.

He swam fast, to get clear of the suction. When he looked back, from inside the reef, there was no sign of the ship.

Off Kalaau he had cut his beard and shaved. Men would be seeking a bearded Phil Stone; he reasoned, as a result of MacPherson's story.

He slept on the shore, while his clothes dried. It was a lonely spot, and he was not disturbed. Late in the afternoon he started on foot for Waikiki. It was almost midnight when he arrived.

George Tower lived in Haleiwa. But George, Phil knew, unfortunately could be of no assistance now; for he was in the Honolulu General Hospital, recovering from an appendicitis operation. Phil went instead to the home of Hector Walt.

This man Walt was one of those racial mixtures which are not uncommon at the Pacific gateway where East and West not only meet but habitually get mixed up with each other. The proprietor of a large laundry, he was, at a guess, about one-half English, one-quarter Portuguese, one-eighth Hawaiian, and one-eighth Korean. He was big, and had sleepy, but shrewd, black eyes and a sleepy smile. He spoke with no special accent, and at a glance you would have put him down as a white man. But his eyes betrayed the Oriental strain.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUILTY ONE.

HE was alone, reading a magazine, when Phil quietly walked out on the lanai. It was on the side of the bungalow, and well screened.

Walt stiffened, gasping.

"Good Lord! Phil Stone!"

"Yes," said Phil.

"But how in the world—? How—?"

"I came by way of the back door, and through the kitchen."

"Wasn't Kang—?"

"He's asleep in the kitchen." Phil drew up a chair. He tapped Hector Walt's knee. "You've probably been reading about me?"

"Oh, the papers are full of it! I don't understand. What happened to that detective?"

"Hector, I want to get out of the Islands. I want to get to California."

"Well . . ."

"I wouldn't have come to you, Hector, except that I figured you were my friend."

"Why, of course! Sure I'm your friend!"

"Yes. You were with me that night at the Moana when Harry Zimmerman was killed. You were one of the ones who held me back when I wanted to hit Zimmerman. You know I didn't kill that man."

He was staring intently at his host. Walt, now that the first shock of recognition had passed, was all smiles. He waved his hands, cried softly and in a polite voice:

"Why, of course you didn't! I always believed in your innocence, even though it did look mighty bad for you."

"It did, that's true." Again he tapped Walt's knee. "I hope some day to be able to prove my innocence, but meanwhile I've got to clear out of this place. Now, Hector, I don't want to butt into your personal affairs, but there was always a rumor that you had connections here—that you could fix up something like this."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's not beat around the bush. I'll hand you two thousand dollars cash the minute you place me aboard a boat bound for either Los Angeles or Frisco, with the

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captain or some other person in authority instructed to land me safely—and to keep his mouth shut. You can do that, Hector. Will you?"

"It would be hard. You'd have to be concealed here, or somewhere around here, while I made the arrangements. That might take a couple of days. And you'd have to be smuggled on board. And it would be necessary to fix things with the officer . . . Yes, it'd be hard."

"Two thousand dollars is a lot, these days."

"It isn't the money I'm worrying about . . ." Walt lowered his chin, slapped the arms of the chair. "But I'll do it, Phil! I'll do it for you because you're my friend!"

"Fine," said Phil. His right hand was inside his shirt, and he was watching Hector Walt closely.

Walt called: "Kang!"

THE servant who responded was a house "boy" only by courtesy title. He was, in fact, about thirty-five, a truncated, powerful - shouldered Chinese with long thick arms, huge hands, and a vacuous expression—or no expression at all.

Walt said to Phil: "I'll caution Kang to silence, and then get him to make a few preliminary inquiries."

He spoke rapidly to the servant for a minute, in Cantonese. Kang turned.

Phil Stone said: "Wait!" His hand came out of his shirt, with Olsen's pistol.

"Evidently you didn't know that I understand Cantonese?"

The host was silent, and didn't move, except that his eyelids drooped a little.

"So you'd turn me in? I had an idea you'd try that, Hector. Stand up. And turn around."

The big man obeyed. Phil patted his hip pockets. He was not wearing a coat. Then Phil patted Kang's hip and coat pockets.

"I have another idea, too," Phil said. "If you were so anxious to turn me in and get a thousand dollars reward, as compared to the two thousand I offered you to get me to California, it must mean something else. You don't pass up a thousand dollars unless it's mighty important, Hector. You'd like to see me hang for the murder of Harry Zimmerman, wouldn't you? Sure. Because that would finish all investigation, and you wouldn't have to worry any more. You killed Harry Zimmerman yourself, didn't you, Hector? Sure. And you slipped those cartridges into my pocket immediately after the fight, because then and there you saw a chance of getting rid of Zimmerman and putting the blame on me. And you followed me out on the beach, didn't you? And you threw that gun at me? And then I helped you out even more by being damn fool enough to run away."

"If it gives you any satisfaction to think that."

"It does! I've been wondering about it for a long time, and I knew it must have been one of you four fellows who kept me from smacking Zimmerman. And you seemed the most likely. And then when I learned that Zimmerman had been mixed up in the alien smuggling racket here, that made it a cinch."

"You haven't got proof of anything at all," said Walt.

Phil smiled.

"Now you're trying to get me into an argument so that I won't see Kang—who's not supposed to understand English—trying to slip the receiver off that telephone over there."

Kang took his hand away from the instrument.

"Go ahead," Phil urged. "The wire runs around into the living room there, and before I came out here I took the precaution to pull it out of the box. So take the thing off all you wish."

Kang made a face, seemed to be furious. Petulantly he reached for the telephone instrument as though to knock it over. Instead, however, he threw it into Phil Stone's face.

The move was totally unexpected. Phil had not supposed that Kang possessed the daring to do a thing like that. It had been, moreover, a stupid attack. Phil ducked the instrument.

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IT was Hector Walt who fooled him even more than Kang had done. As Phil straightened, opened his mouth for a command, Walt whirled. Something hard hit Phil's ribs.

"All right, Phil. Drop that gun."

Phil only turned his head and eyes. There was a little black automatic digging into his ribs, and Hector Walt's broad face, looking more Oriental than ever, was very close to his own. The runner on the table had been swept to the floor. The automatic had come from under that runner.

"Drop it, Phil. I'm in my own house, remember."

Very slowly Phil Stone released the detective's revolver. As it fell, Kang stooped swiftly and caught it.

"We'll use that on you," Walt said cheerfully, "when we get you out in the country. And then we'll leave it in your hand." He was all smiles again.

"So you figured me in, huh? Well, when they find your stiff nobody else will figure that way. If there was ever any doubt in anybody's mind that you killed Zimmerman, it'll disappear when you're found a suicide."

Phil asked quietly: "Why did you do it, by the way?"

"Because the bum chiselled into my business! He found out something he shouldn't know. And then he came to me for money, and I had to give it to him. And he came again, and again."

"So you'd rather kill a man than pay blackmail?"

"No, I'd rather have paid the blackmail. I've got a good business here, smuggling Japs into the U. S., and it would have been worth my while. That wasn't what made me shoot Zimmerman. It was because Zimmerman was such a loud-mouthed drunk."

Kang was examining Matt Olsen's revolver. He was like a savage with a trinket.

Phil said: "Listen. I left that detective out on a reef some distance off Molokini. If I'm killed there will be nobody to know he's there."

"Why should I worry about that? Matter of fact, I'll be glad to get rid of Olsen. He's too conscientious."

"But you can't just let a man stay there and starve!"

"Why can't I? Wasn't that what you were going to do?"

"Of course not! I'd have wired his bearings from the mainland. I'll give them to you now, and then you can—"

"Keep 'em. Matt Olsen's no pal of mine, and I'm not going to get into any trouble trying to explain how I learned where he was. If I sent an anonymous letter, or made an anonymous phone call to the cops, either one might be traced. And I can't afford an investigation, right now. No, Olsen can stay there. It's a good place for him. And now you march along with Kang and me, out to my car. And remember that if you try to make a break I'll shoot to kill. You're a fugitive from justice, and a dangerous man, and I could get away with it if I had to. Now move!"

But Phil Stone didn't move.

"I don't leave here," he said, "until you promise to see that Olsen is rescued."

There was a long silence, while the two men stared at each other. Kang continued to examine the revolver, fascinated.

"No," said Hector Walt at last, "I don't suppose you would. You're just that kind of a guy. Well then, we'll have to hand you the death slug right here and now."

FROM somewhere behind Phil a gun crashed twice. Hector Walt's right arm jerked back, and for an instant the automatic was out of line. In that instant Phil Stone dived.

He dived at the legs. He heard the automatic explode twice, just above his head. It sounded as though it exploded *inside* his head! He thudded to the floor with a double armful of Hector Walt, and he got his left hand on the gun.

It sounded, now, as though the whole place was blowing up. Kang, panicky, had started to run back into the living room, had paused, had turned and lifted his revolver—and had been thrown upon his back by a volley of lead. Phil saw this

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under one armpit, as he hald Hector Walt and Hector Walt's automatic.

Then Walt seemed to be yanked away from him, and he rolled upon empty floor.

"*Hold that guy! Pull him off!*"

There was an enormous hole in one of the screens. A huge Kanaka, almost naked, had Hector Walt backed against the wall and was holding him upright with his left hand while he punched his face again and again with his right. Walt was unconscious.

Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen came climbing through the hole.

"Pull that fool off! He'll kill the guy!"

Phil yelled: "Hey, stop it!"

The Kanaka turned, all grin, releasing Hector Walt, who slipped into a heap.

"He try to hurt you," Hoopono said, helping Phil to his feet, "so I hit him."

"*Hit* him?" Olsen went to the badly mauled figure on the floor. "We're lucky you didn't *kill* him. I want this guy alive, to repeat that confession I just heard."

"I'm a little balled up," Phil confessed. "What happened?"

"I swim," Hoopono said.

"Why, it must have been five miles, in a storm! and you had a bullet in you!"

"This baby," Olsen said grimly, "could probably swim the ocean, if he had to. And the slug hadn't hurt him much. Tore right through the loose flesh of his left hip and chipped the bone there a little. That don't mean much to a guy like this."

Hoopono grinned. "I swim," he said again. "Long swim."

"Then when he got to land," explained Olsen, "he tried to give you a break by reporting that you intended to sail south toward the Big Island. So all the planes went that way, the first day. The one that flew over us was just a stray, one of the just-in-case planes. It wasn't until today that they really began searching that area, after they hadn't been able to find you down Hawaii way. And so they saw me, and picked me up. And I flew here from Maui, bringing this Kanaka along with me, partly because I wanted to hold him as a material witness, and partly because I couldn't get rid of the guy anyway. He was wild to get to where you were."

"But how in the world did you know where I was?"

"I didn't. I just guessed. From what you'd told me I figured that you suspected one of the four guys who held you that night. And I knew your friend Tower was in the hospital, so you wouldn't go to him. I figured you might go to one of those four guys and do something rash—maybe try to beat the truth out of one of them. So I decided to visit all four of them. And this house happened to be the nearest one to the landing field."

"Did you hear much?"

"I heard enough."

"Then I'm free?"

"You are not," said Matt Olsen. "I'm no judge and jury, or prosecutor, or anything else. I'm just a cop. And as far as I'm concerned you're just a guy who has a murder indictment against him. And besides, there's a thousand dollars reward, and I got a house in Moana that ain't all paid for yet. Come out and see me there some time, when they let you go."

Phil Stone smiled.

"You're not mad at me any more then?"

"Hell, I'm never mad at anybody. I just arrest guys. I'm a cop, see? That's all I am, a cop." He was bathing Hector Walt's battered face with a wet cloth. "Besides, I heard what you said to this guy a little while ago—about me. You think I'd be sore at anybody after that?" He rose, frowning. "I'd have plugged him in the gun arm sooner than I did, only I was anxious to hear him say all he had to say about killing Harry Zimmerman. And then when I did start shooting, this Kanaka boy friend of yours went absolutely nuts."

"I hit him," said Hoopono, grinning. "He try to hurt you, Mr. Arthurs, so I hit him. Now I go to jail with you."

Lieutenant of Detectives Matt Olsen growled: "Well, I guess we can fix it up for you, if that's what you want. Only it shouldn't make much difference. Neither one of you will be in there very long."

THE END

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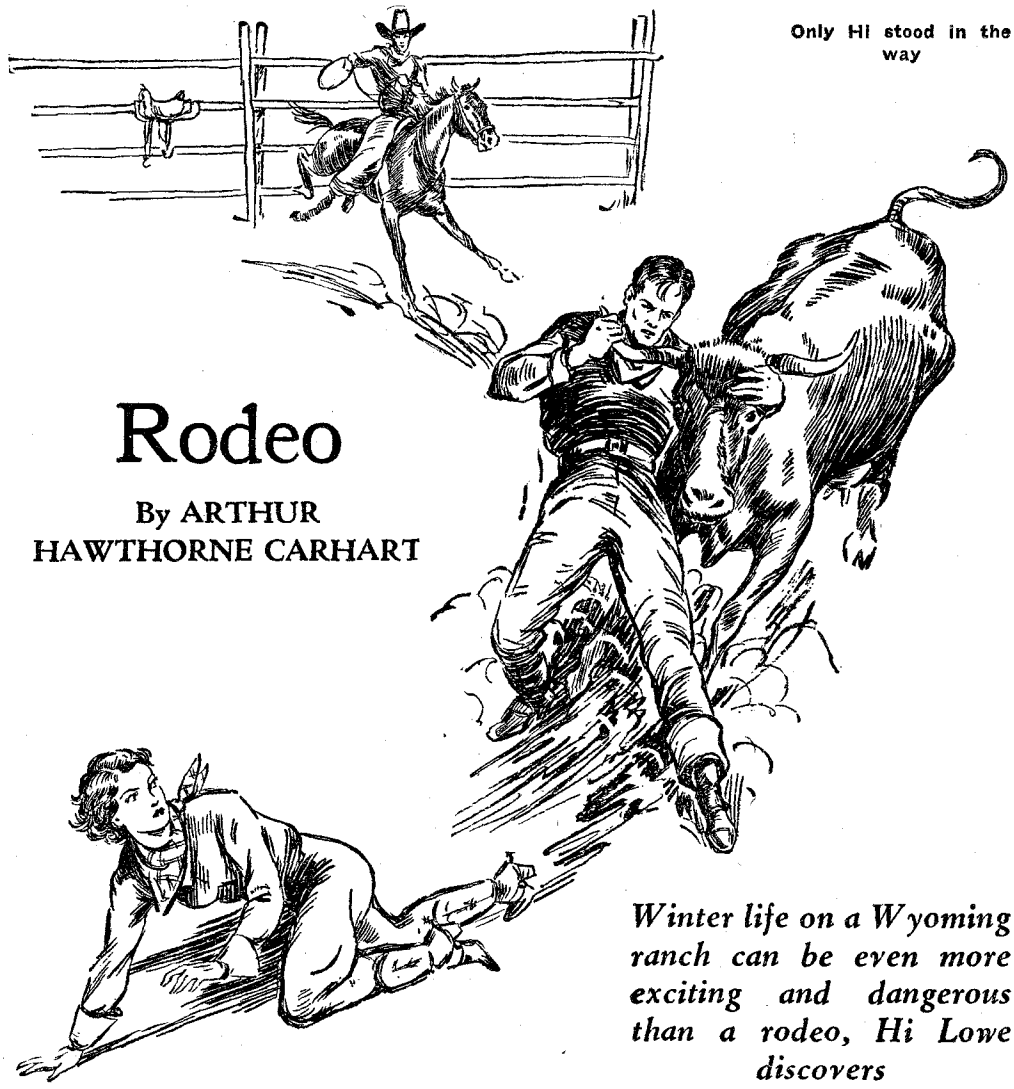

Only Hi stood in the way

Rodeo

By ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

Winter life on a Wyoming ranch can be even more exciting and dangerous than a rodeo, Hi Lowe discovers

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HIRAM LOWE, cowboy and rodeo performer, decided that the best way to end it all was to drink himself to death when he received a raw break from a crooked arena judge. He kept that up for two years and did a pretty good job of it. Then came the Frontier Days rodeo at Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Hi and his young friend, Sixty Jones, entered the roping and riding contests.

Anson Bagwell, the same man who had played crooked with Hi two years before, caused Sixty to be thrown by a bucking bronc, which nearly stamped the life out of him before the could be rescued.

Hi jumped Bagwell, and was thrown into jail, as Sixty was being carted off to the hospital. Then old Andy Wallace, stockman, got Hi out on the condition that Hi straighten up and behave himself. When Bagwell was murdered, Hi was suspected, but cleared himself, with the aid of Dawn Wallace, Andy's daughter, and Hub Wallace, his son.

This story began in the Argosy for November 9

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Hi got the impression that Sixty had died, and the cowboy promptly went on a spree and tried to take Cheyenne apart. When he came to he was in a car driven by Dawn, heading for the Wallace ranch. He was to work there until the fall, when the rodeo season was over. Sixty was to join him when he got out of the hospital.

Steve Capps, foreman during Wallace's absence, told Hi that there was a certain distant part of the range he must stay off, under Andy Wallace's orders.

CHAPTER X.

DEATH CHARGE.

SKIFFY snow sugared high ridges, melted. A spot of aspen ripened before severe frost hit, and was a shivering blob of autumn gold among thickets above Crystal Park. The first gather was combed out from Clancy Basin, the farthest out-flung lease on which Andy Wallace ran cattle.

Dust in the air, the flick-flack snap and clatter of hoofs on pebbly ground, and men yelling. Irby Paul on a buckskin over to the right, Casey Owens on a black-maned bay crowding left flank, Hi Lowe and Steve Capps on creamy-lathered blacks, hammering the drag and breathing dust in spite of kerchiefs, masking all except eyes. Hi and Steve rode together quite often lately; without much talk, but with a growing respect and liking for each other.

"You limb of the devil," bawled Irby, as a muley that wanted to let a lubberly half-grown calf get trail lunch started for a brushy hillside. "Hoo-ah, you damned old rip! Hoo-ah! Get over there before I knock the hell outa yah!"

"Speak gently, Mister Paul," called Capps. "She's a mother. There's a society red-hot to put rough men like you in jail for talking that-a-way to lady cows. 'Specially before their children."

"Dang her bleary eyes," blustered Irby. "Old brush-hurdler's been tryin' to shade up an' let that bull calf feed for the past hour. Damn old fool." Irby made the last all one connected word.

Curse 'em. Sure. Yell at 'em, and whack 'em over the rumps. But when the outfit gets in a jam, just go ahead and gamble your life to protect the dumb brutes. Go to the brink of death if need be, riding for the outfit. Strikers, who brawl and squabble about wages or hours or something else, probably couldn't savvy. Would call such riders fools.

Yeah, that kind never'd understand traditions and such.

Curse those cows; blast their hides! Yeah, but ride like hell if you have to do it to save these four-legged brutes from their own dumbness.

"Yeow old idiot," blared Irby, as the muley quit the herd again. "I've a mind to pick up a rock and sock somethin' like brains into that ugly head of yourn. Hi-damyah!"

Sundown. And the herd milling and shoving into the upper corral. Every pony tired. Men saddle weary. But the last critter was chased through the gate with dash and flourish. That particular chore done. Tomorrow something different. Calves dropped on the range since spring round-up must be branded and dehorned. Probably someone would get kicked in the middle, and all would be soiled, dirty and blood-spattered before the job was finished. Tomorrow's job. Always something in the way of work waiting when turning earth spun the sun above the hogback.

Hi Lowe was glad it was so. Work was burning beery fat out of his tissue and when his tongue got desert-dry

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for hard drinks he always could work until he was groggy and forgot liquor.

HI LOWE was tramping near to the kitchen porch before he realized another rhythm was in the jingle-jangle of the big triangle. Mom Peters was not beating it. He stopped and stared.

Dawn Wallace stood, cheeks flushed, eyes alight, laughing. Sixty Jones was getting up a little stiffly from the bench by the door.

"Whoa, easy now," warned Dawn as Hi came, hurrying. "Don't stampede the cripples!" She dropped the spike beater which had hammered the triangle, and grabbed a cane leaning against a porch pole. Hi saw she stood on one foot, the other touching the ground only with toes.

"What—" began Hi.

"At Las Vegas; doubled ankle under in changing second heat of the relay run," said Dawn. "Tore some ligaments. Supposed to stay at Vegas in bed several weeks. Got the doctor to strap a metal brace on the ankle, and hit for my home range. Picked up Sixty on the way. And are we glad to be here? Ask us!" She held out her free hand and Hi got a firm grip. "Gee," said Dawn, "you look great. Great!"

Steve Capps arrived, and she turned her back on Hi. Sixty ambled toward Hi, grinning, and saying, "Gosh, old hoss, it's better'n a month in the hospital just to lay eyes on you." He pumped Hi's hand. Mom came out of the kitchen, Casey and Irby whooped welcome to Dawn, everyone tried to talk at once, and when the first lull came, Dawn introduced Sixty to the three home crew men.

"I killed some chickens," Mom shrilled. "You boys hurry up; hurry now. Dawn's eatin' with the crew in the kitchen until her Pa gets home. Chicken and cherry pie, so now you, Irby, and you, Casey, get ready for supper, 'cause supper's right ready. I saw you boys comin' and timed it perzacly."

Talk, and purposeful eating at the supper table. The Wallace outfit had swung on from Monte, winning and losing at several rodeos. Then this little accident at Las Vegas. Dawn unable to ride again this season. Bird Troxell, whose father had a ranch at Torada Nigra, New Mexico, would ride the racing string at Winnemucca Fair over in Nevada. The outfit was scheduled to hit a couple of Class D rodeos over in Arizona after that, and then come home. But Andy would take the train directly to New York City.

"Guess that's news," began Steve Capps.

"You know it; big news!" Dawn pushed back from the table. "The Garden management wired dad that they want him to contract the stock for the big rodeo next season."

"The old man's swung it, then," said Capps.

"Isn't it perfectly swell, Steve?" said Dawn. "Isn't it gorgeous? For years he's been wanting to take the best stock he could rake up to that show. Here's his chance."

Reefs of talk. Mom gave Irby and Casey each a second segment of pie without their clamoring for it. She saw what she had done, and slyly slipped a third section in front of Sixty.

"If our outfit's goin' to the big city show," said Mom to Sixty, "you'll have to put a lot of meat on your ribs. You go ridin' broncs now with no more weight'n you've got, you'd get throwed plenty."

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Talk split up. Sixty was telling Hi about the hospital. Dawn and Steve Capps got up and went out on the porch. When Hi and Sixty came from the kitchen, pretty much of that bench was taken and Capps didn't shove over to give room. Sixty and Hi sat on the other bench over by the bunkhouse. They could see the glowing end of Capps' cigarette pulsing in the dusk under the porch as Sixty talked to Hi; a lot of news and gossip. Hi caught one connected piece of talk; Eva Lord acquitted of the murder of Anse Bagwell on a plea of self defense. The story she told would have freed any woman.

"She came to see me at the hospital," said Sixty. "Really, she's a peach of a girl."

"Yeah," said Hi, then turned. "Who you talkin' about?" he demanded.

"Eva Lord," said Sixty. "She's not so bad. Had tough breaks!"

"Yeah," said Hi, "maybe so." And he turned his attention again to the shadows under the kitchen porch. Still there, Capps' cigarette a red point in the deepening night, when Hi got up, shook himself and remarked, "Time for workin' men and invalids to hit the hay, kid. Let's turn in."

BUT he lay awake, afterward, plagued by the deepening realization of how much he had been looking forward to the return of Dawn Wallace. Well, she was here. And what of it?

He hadn't figured she'd be sitting all this first evening, in the shadows under the kitchen porch, just with Steve Capps to talk to. Capps had held both her hands that other time, too. And she'd let him, what's more.

What could Hi Lowe, rodeo bum, expect? He'd almost lost proper realization of his status. It was only a few weeks ago they'd run him out of Cheyenne to keep him from going to jail. Capps was all right, a good fellow. Hi Lowe had come near to forgetting how very recently he'd been in the gutter; lost remembrance along range trails and in heavy work. Others hadn't. Capps was better company for Dawn. Particularly if Hi Lowe had a lawless mission waiting in the south range. Anyway, didn't she want to be with Capps alone this first evening? Sure.

Hadn't Hi Lowe lost his saddle; lost all his luck? Sure.

He exiled himself. Rode early, came in late to eat cold snack suppers after others had finished. Usually he found Dawn and Capps on the porch bench, talking. That was proof, wasn't it, that she wanted to be with Capps? Course it was.

Dawn was waiting one evening, and blocked his way as he started from the saddle shed toward the house.

"You've been avoiding me," she stated. "Why?"

"Me? Avoiding you?" He lifted eyebrows. "Hadn't noticed it."

"Others have. And remarked about it."

"Capps, maybe?"

"Maybe he has. I was thinking particularly about Sixty Jones."

"That kid been talkin' somethin' wild? If he has—"

"You'll do nothing about it. Sixty's one of the whitest kids that ever came off a Wyoming ranch. He worships you."

"Thought maybe they cured him at the hospital, even of that."

"If someone really thought as much of me as he does of you, I'd not want it cured, ever." Dawn's voice got throaty. "If someone cared like that

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for me, I'd try to live up to it; live up to everything expected of me." She ended as her breath caught.

Yep. She was talking to the rodeo bum; one her old man had fished out of the gutter. For some purpose, some obscure reason.

Hadn't measured up somehow. Done his best all the time he'd been here. Best wasn't enough, apparently. Still just a bum. She'd come down here to tell him so, this way.

"*Bueno,*" he breathed slowly, and stepped by her. Capps was all right. Capps was her kind.

She saw the shambling uncertainty back in his step as he started toward the house. She ran, limping, after him, caught him, turned him.

"I didn't mean that the way you took it," she said hurriedly. "I was thinking of Cheyenne. How you went into the Sheriff's office and lied, just to protect me from a charge of murder. I thought you cared something— Sixty said you thought I—" That wasn't what she wanted to say, at all. She stood, trying to smother words.

ARENA memories. They'd swirled and eddied around Hi Lowe from the hour she and Sixty had returned. Memories. Crowds cheering; crowds going wild; crowds yelling, and a loud speaker bawling out Hi Lowe's record time in the calf roping. Old days. Then later days; Hi Lowe sliding to hell. Clear down. Only Sixty Jones holding, and holding—

"Sixty overrates me, awful," said Hi quite soberly. "He's never admitted I was a rodeo tramp; just a good ranch hand gone to the dogs. He's never admitted that; but I know the truth. I can't forget I'm just a rodeo tramp, picked out of a sluice that races down to hell,—and brought here to a —home." He drew a deep breath. "If there's even a streak of what Sixty thinks is in me, I mustn't forget that. None of it." He said it with eyes far-focused on afterglow clouds eastward from the hogback. He saw a shadow coming. "Here," he said quietly, "comes someone, Steve. Huntin' you, I reckon. He's a darned good man, every way, Steve is."

He stepped aside, then slouched toward the house.

He didn't know her eyes were brimming. Nor did Steve Capps. And Steve wondered why she didn't talk this evening. She just sat, thinking, and holding her hands, tight, in her lap, as though she held something, afraid if she made a move, said a word, that the something might go flying away, wildly.

Hi Lowe rode early, far and late. If anyone noted how constantly he was away from headquarters, nobody said anything. It was what was expected of riders this time of year.

Bright days, with frost in the air. More cold plastered into the aspen thickets. Snow staying on now after squalls hit the high range. Storms over the high country coming oftener. Sixty rode a little, now, near the home ranch, often with Dawn. But Hi Lowe started in cold daybreak, usually with one of the others, rode high basins, fought through lodgepole thickets, chasing out keg-headed cows that didn't know enough to hunt lower range when winter was coming.

Bitter smoke of branding fires wavered over home corrals. Calves bawled as they felt the searing kiss of branding irons and the slice of sharp blades. Range cows in near pastures and corrals bellowed in crazed and futile anger. Cows can't understand that their calves are chattels, and that men mark,

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brand and trim as part of raising beef crops.

Hi Lowe roped. A cinch strap lacing broke as a heavy calf was snared. Hi quit Punch, his roping-horse, and started over to the saddle room to get a strip of leather. Saw Dawn coming from the house. He stopped her.

"Kinda bloody over there," he ventured casually.

She smiled slightly; and said as casually, "I've lived on this ranch all my life. This happens every spring and fall. I'd be in the saddle, helping, if it wasn't that my ankle's still a little uncertain. I ride in the arenas; but this is my bailiwick. I guess I can stand anything I'll see today."

"I'll get a lacing and walk to the corrals with you," he said. As he came back, and fell in slow stride beside her, he observed, "I never saw cows so wrought up as this bunch. They'd like to jump the corral fence and gore somebody. And some of that bunch've got horns to do it, too."

"Sometimes I feel a little sorry for them; and sometimes they're such old fools." Dawn limped a little, and they walked slowly across the hard-tramped open yard between barns and corrals.

A calf bellowed, louder, it seemed, than all those before. A cow, mother of the calf, mooed wildly, beyond pole fences. The brittle crack of dry corral poles splintered through the air. Men yelled, in quick shearing warning. Between corral poles Hi saw them throwing themselves away from the branding fire; saw the tumbling, mad-rolling lunge of the wild cow coming over broken fence into the corral. Two riders, on horses, tried to dodge a charge by the cow. Animal bodies thudded heavily against the old corral gate.

"Look out! Hey! Hey; look *out!*"

"She'll gore somebody," said Hi Lowe quickly. "If there's any more weight against that gate—"

THE smashing, cracking sound of wood tearing cut Hi short. Horses at the gate were trying to get free from those knifing horns. Then hinges ripped. The gate fell out. There was a snarl of horses, floundering, the mad cow and her half-branded calf, jumping and stumbling past, men kicking free, and a flashing, half-frozen instant in which the cow stumbled to her feet, and stood, feet wide, eyes wide, nostrils wide, and looked, with tipsy wildness, at two people on foot out there in the open between the saddle room and the pole corral. Two people —on foot. Enemies! She bellowed as she began the stoop-shouldered, head-down run toward Hi and Dawn.

"Leg it!" rasped Hi.

Dawn started, cutting toward the nearest corral fence.

Hi saw her bad ankle give. She fell. Men yelled. Futile to yell. Futile as hell, with that mad, horned animal charging. Nobody on horseback; nobody with a rope. No chance to get braced. Hi turned.

He pitched himself, spinning as he hit. It was like throwing himself at the blunt end of a locomotive. That, and at the same moment trying to dodge knifing horns.

He had bulldogged in no contest; but he'd tried it on the range. What he knew about it he used desperately. But the first smash hit the wind from him; swiped it right out of his insides. Meat slamming meat, and the cow had advantage.

He gripped. One horn, then another. Then tried to brace. He was thrown, sidewise. With an angry head toss the cow knocked him off balance. He tried

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to square away, get bootheels braced, to drag her down. He got her head low. There was a chance he might stack her up—peg a horn in solid ground as she flung down her head and lunged.

He pitched his weight as her head was down-tossed, felt the horn peg, solidly. He was conscious of the fact that the old brute was stacking up; that she was piling over onto him and that he must get from under. He was hit, one numbing blow, then, as she flailed with her front feet. Next instant he was in the midst of tumbling, rolling smashing tangle as she half fell on him. He floundered; was caught, hard, by her bony head thrusting him against the ground; and a hoof dealt him a sound, full blow on the skull.

Cow spilling on him. Things going black. Sickening black. Loosing holds. Hands all wood. Cow stacking up. Dawn getting away; sure. Steve Capps yelling something—something—

Steve was yelling. Riding. Dawn was over by the corral fence, looking back.

All in a flash Steve Capps saw this; then threw the small loop he had made. It shot fast, true, close. He whipped it, and almost in the same move threw a half hitch after the loop. His pony slued to a tight stop, and the cow's hind legs faded from under as she tried to get footing again. The cow, slavering, bellowing, tried to wallow up, eyes wildly walled. With every fiber she tried to get set to plunge horns into the soft unprotected belly of Hi Lowe as he lay white, still, red-stained there on the ground.

Irby Paul had got the other pony going, a loop whirling. The lariat dropped on the old cow's ugly head, and her neck jerked long. Sixty Jones, his face so white freckles looked like pitted rust spots, ran, knelt, and touched Hi Lowe with hands that hunted feverishly for broken bones. But even as he knelt, swiftly, Dawn Wallace was beside him, calling the name of Hi Lowe.

HALF doubled as he dismounted, Steve Capps straightened suddenly, eyes wide. And listened, while the muscles at his jaw base got rough because his teeth were locked hard. But he spoke quietly as Dawn looked up.

"It'll take more than that," said Capps, "to kill him. Best maybe we get him to the bunkhouse before he comes to. Carry his feet, Sixty; I'll get under his shoulders."

Steve Capps went outside after they had lain Hi Lowe on his cot in the bunkhouse. Steve smoked, and waited. And looked, with unseeing eyes, toward the piney ridge and the Blue Cliffs country. He had hardly moved when Dawn came, slowly, leaning heavily on her cane, and stood, balanced, beside him.

"Sixty is helping Hi get undressed," she said, looking away from Steve. "Hi was just knocked cold, not seriously hurt. I thought, for a minute, he'd been killed."

After a dragging wait, Dawn turned deliberately.

"Have I made a fool of myself, Steve?" she asked.

"It's awful hard to judge," replied Steve, refusing to turn and meet her inquiring gaze.

"Tell me, what did I say?" Her voice commanded.

"It wasn't what you said, so much," he replied soberly, "as the way you said it."

He looked at the very close-smoked

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stub of his brown cigarette, thoughtfully flicked ashes from it, then on impulse, viciously ground out the fire against a porch post and flung the crushed fragment of paper and tobacco from him. But again, when he spoke, it was with deep calm and deep bitterness.

"It's a long time," Steve said, "since my father was killed in that war with them homesteaders; long time since Andy took me in, because my old man had been his foreman time of that shooting."

Steve sucked a slow breath through white teeth. "But I guess ever since that long ago, I've sorta prayed that some day I'd hear you calling me, with that same promise of life that was in your voice when you called him." Steve stopped, then said, "Maybe I oughtn't to say such things to you now, Dawnie."

Stillness caught between them as he used her childhood name. He had whispered it, as though precious memory was more real at this moment than living present. Then Steve shrugged.

"Guess it'll make no real difference," he said. "No particular difference if you know now that I've always loved you. No difference, because you're dead in love with that rodeo tramp."

He turned, dark eyes demanding an answer from her.

SHE shook her head slowly. She chewed her lip a little, thoughtfully, like old Andy did when something hit him hard.

"Steve, I don't know," she declared. "I wonder."

"You're in love with that fellow called Lowe." Hard accusal slipped into his voice, and bitterness.

"Well," she demanded in quick defiance, "what if I am?"

"God help you," he said huskily, "if you tumbled for *him.*"

"So you don't think he rates as a man?"

"He's a good enough man," said Steve Capps, "on any man's ranch—except this one. Here he's more sure to make trouble than a lit fuse in the middle of Hell's powderhouse."

"You're just bitter, and jealous." She dug at him with the words, trying to find what was deeper. There was something, but she could not get grips on it.

Steve looked up over a fresh-rolled cigarette, eyes wide. Muscles that made his jaw-base seem wider when they bunched were rough under sunburn. He stared, immobile for a moment, then nodded, licked the cigarette deliberately, and said harshly, "Guess it's best we let it stand that way; I'm bitter, and jealous. Maybe being that way prompts me to warn you that somehow this Hiram Lowe's connected somehow with the Blue Cliffs trouble."

"Steve! You're merely trying to turn me against him. Let's have it, if you've got proof of this!"

Steve shook his head, and said, truthfully, "I've got no proof. But someway he's connected with it, and if you're in love with each other—God have mercy on you both!"

He spun, suddenly, and stumped toward the corrals.

CHAPTER XI.

DRIFT OR DIE.

THE rodeo crew returned, and days immediately following were something like a bad mixture of Old Home Week, a one-ring circus

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and a spill into the booby hatch. High jinks and rowdy-dowdy messing around were carded in between solid chunks of labor.

Along with Mel Myers the rodeo clown, Cross-bar Cameron the perennial contester, Hack Nash the bulldogger, and Hub Wallace, came other arena personages; Buttercup, the lady jackass, Sweetwater Jake, Lazy Daisy, Plugged Nickel and other broncs; Chugwater Cora and other racers. Among the broncs was Wildcat, the outlaw that had tried to smash the life out of Sixty Jones after Anse Bagwell had tampered with back cinch straps. That had been the start of a chain that still spun toward obscure destinies. Now the chain had brighter links and some more somber.

Andy Wallace had gone on to New York. As days narrowed toward time of his return, Hi Lowe made ready for the hour when they would face each other. He would get all the answers to all the questions this time. That half-clear agreement they had made would be plenty clear, in every detail, before they stopped talking. This question of why Hi Lowe was forbidden the southern range, too. It was a deal, and Hi Lowe would go through with whatever was required to balance accounts.

But as he faced toward this meeting and showdown, he questioned more searchingly why Andy Wallace had taken the trouble to block Hi from a tumble all the way to the bottom.

He felt he was somehow a marked man and he herded by himself, even avoiding Sixty Jones.

Indian Summer doubled back on itself. Winter was driven into temporary retreat north of the Hoodoos, or quite beyond the Selkirks. Sun still poured drouth-fire from waterless skies, and out on the plains cattle suffered, or were shot for canning. But such troublous ranching did not stalk in between the north-and-south hogback and the first granite hills. Haystacks dotted the valley, and streams came foaming, though in less volume, from old ice capping the back range. Even after golden leaves had fallen from the aspens, Indian Summer kept crowding hard back against winter, and the days were bright and mellow. Nights were brittle with new frost, a reminder of winter sure to come. A moon, bright and round as a newly minted dollar, came to splash each evening with radiant, reflected silver.

"But say, when winter does come," Cross-bar sagely said as he hoisted and hooked his limp over his good knee, "she'll take holt like a widow sayin' 'yes' to a stutterin' bachelor."

"Station BUNK now presents Andy's Fork Almanac and advice to the lovelorn," declared Mel to an imaginary audience. He had been tuning his fiddle. "The next voice you'll hear will be Mel Myers and his magic violin."

"I'm here to state," said Hack Nash loudly, to anyone who would hark, "that all we had to listen to out on the rodeo circuits was steam calliopes, an' bands, an' other gentle music. Sure was a rest from hearin' Mel torture that mess of cat-gut and coffin shingles."

"Ain't no legal way to stop it," mourned Cross-bar. "You can poison potato bugs or prairie dogs, an' God an' the law don't hold again' you, an' you can drown unwanted kittens, but there ain't no open season on them that fiddles. By gravy, I'm goin' to sing, so I am!"

Mel Myers sawed a screechy string defiantly.

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"Do-o--ooo!" sounded Cross-bar. "Let 'er go, Mel; 'Mid pleas-zures, an' pullusses, wheyer'er weee may roooam! Beeit av-ver sooo hummm-bull, there's nooo-woo place—!"

"Yeoww. Yip-yip-yip yeeeowoooo!" Hack Nash lifted his round head on his short neck, and he was a howling coyote.

BUTTERCUP, who had been daintily sampling bridal wreath bushes just beyond the corner, came solemnly, cleared all decks with a gusty snort, hung her head over the barnyard gate, and brayed. Hack Nash let her in ceremoniously.

"Powder River," yelled Casey Owens, who came to the bunkhouse doorway as he delicately swept back his cow horn mustache with rough stubby fingers. "Ain't it good to be free, twenty-one an' in yore right mind. Powder River! She's wild like a cow!"

A fine bedlam, a very fine, inspired bedlam, and Irby Paul came slashing out of the bunk room, flailing with his long, stringy arms, shadow fighting through the center of it.

"Irby," demanded Cross-bar as he ceased roaring. "Irby, what in hell's got into you, hey?"

Irby turned solemnly, one eye centered on Cross-bar. The other pointed toward Jimmy Creek. "Got into me?" he asked darkly. "Say, what's got into all you? Me? I'm only gone bats, and that's simple."

"Haw—hee-hee-haw," chortled Buttercup, and knocked Hack Nash off the steps with a loving wallop of her jackass head.

"Seems the boys are glad to be home," remarked Dawn Wallace softly. She had stopped Hi Lowe as he came from late supper and persuaded him to sit on the empty bench beside her. He nodded in the shadow, she waited, and then put a question that was direct. "Have you found it so here?" she inquired.

"Found what so?" He was flatly unresponsive.

"Don't you remember we talked about home when I brought you here, and I said I hoped you'd find something like it here. Have you?"

"Not yet," said Hi after he had thought a moment. You didn't feel at home when you had to wait and speculate on what lawless act might have to be done. "I've not found home here yet. Maybe, if it works out so I stay long, I will."

"You're not leaving?"

He avoided the direct answer. "You were a good prophet in one respect," he stated. "I've got my feet back on good ranch earth again. Solid footing. Feel like I was starting somewhere again."

"Back to the arena?"

"It's the only way I can make enough money to pay back what Sixty Jones cost in the hospital." He looked out at the moon-bathed ranch lands. "Part of what I owe I may never be able to pay back, but the money my loop'll drop over can balance the cash account. I pay my debts." He said it with odd emphasis.

SHE changed the subject. "Hi," she said, "you've never told me anything about yourself. Won't you, please?"

"Not much to tell; I was an orphan."

"So was I." She said it softly. "I lost my mother."

"I was a double orphan."

She caught the isolated loneliness in that; a bitter back-glance at a pillar-to-post boyhood. Her urging was not direct.

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"Hub was a baby, and I was only four," stated Dawn, "and I guess if it hadn't been for a neighbor woman, some homesteader's wife who came here when all the others quit the ranch because they were afraid of smallpox, probably all of us would have died. Just as mother did. This woman saved dad, Hub and me."

"There are women like that." A silent moment passed. "Who was she?"

"I don't know, really." Dawn paused. "My dad can't stand to talk about it even now. I think it's all just as vivid to him as though it were yesterday—and as bitter. He's upset for days after it gets mentioned, as it does sometimes. So Hub and I don't keep the subject alive. It's all buried in the past, anyway."

She let the night quiet fill a moment. Buttercup had been exiled to the barnyard. The bunkhouse gang had started toward bed. The old homestead house seemed to shiver a bit because it had to hold such a lovely little riot.

"Your folks?" she put the question on a breath.

"Father shot to death, mother died, somewhere in Wyoming. Not sure what part. I was a small kid then. Maybe I'd remember the exact spot if I saw it. Always figured it was over west of Laramie. If it wasn't so far from here I'd try to run over there this winter and put in a few days."

"Your father — killed on the range?"

"No." He spoke abruptly, then added, "Let's not talk about it."

She waited, and he felt her unspoken urging for him to talk. He began, haltingly; telling how his mother's people, those stanch, God-fearing, religiously-tithing Mormon folk had taken him into their homes, given him their name, and reared him among them.

"Lowe's not your real name?" Dawn made it a question.

"It's my name now," he said, and was gruff. She waited, and he began again, telling of riding faint trails between Moab and Paradox: of cedars bushy on dusty hillsides and how incense was no sweeter than smoke from cedarwood fires under desert skies; of white stars on winter nights when coyotes howled among the Goblin Cliffs and the La Sal mountains were chilled clouds, too heavy to ride the winds, that had fallen, and lay all blue and cold, beyond monumental mesas. He spoke quietly of other nights, when skies glowered, when winds wailed over the sage like mourning ghosts that had lost their way on an excursion out of purgatory, while men, grim, with lips tightdrawn, hunted other men, to kill those men, for misdeeds, for there was no law between Moab and Paradox except that which good men made and forced others to heed.

He talked, with long pauses, but through the words and silences she caught visions of that austere boyhood, and she came to know how it was that once he had broken from it, had tasted the gaiety and glamour of rodeoland, he had lost balance and perspective.

He said again that he had found solid, honest ranch soil under his boot soles since he had come here to Andy's Fork, and that he would climb; and she was certain, knowing him better now, that this climb he was starting would not stop, this time, short of the very top—the world's championship.

THE last wisp of smoke from Hi's final cigarette drifted and dissolved into the liquid silver pouring from the moon.

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He said good night, walked leisurely, and was a man-size figure against warm lamplight as he stood a moment in the doorway.

Dawn, alone, watched stars nod toward midnight. She tried, but found no confirmation of Steve Capps' warning. This Lowe, who had ridden out from Moab into arena limelight, could have no possible connection with black yesterdays at Blue Cliffs. Passing mention of that old range trouble made fiery hatreds boil up within her father. Never, under any circumstances, would Andy bring anyone linked in any manner with that old, red-scarred trouble into this home. It didn't reason out. Hi Lowe couldn't be here and also be connected, even slightly, with those Blue Cliff tragedies. Andy would know, if he was, and never would let him on the place.

Dawn slept soundly that night and awakened smiling. Hi Lowe had his feet on solid rangeland soil again. He was ready to begin a new climb. When arena people start from the ranch, they go far in rodeo contests.

But Dawn Wallace didn't remember that lost saddle.

When an arena man's luck's with him, nothing can stop him. But when it's gone, it's different.

A letter came from Andy Wallace. A wire close on its heels. Shrewdly, Andy realized beef would be higher than two kites by spring. He had delayed his return to arrange a sharefeeding deal with a farmer near Fort Collins. Here beet pulp, cake and corn, as well as alfalfa, would fatten the stock. Only hay was available at Andy's Fork. It was too costly to freight in other feed. Besides putting himself in a position to cash in on beef, Andy would partly clear feed lots and pastures around the home ranch, and that would allow him to start early, at low markets, gathering rodeo stock for next season.

This wire from Andy launched a spurt of saddle work. Feeders to be shipped to Fort Collins had to be at Two-step, trading and shipping point for Kettle River, by the time Andy had his sharefeeder man arrived. Irby and Casey were to go south with the stock as part of the agreement Andy had made.

Pastures and corrals around the barns were cleared of the rodeo stock to make the cutting and sorting go faster. Buttercup, the racing stock and the broncs were turned into the pasture south of Andy's Fork. They had the run of things toward the piney ridge, and as far south as the cross fence beyond the southern break in the hogback.

Feeders were sorted. The afternoon before the drive was to start, the wind began to lash over high crests to the west.

"We'll have to fan our pants tomorrow," said Cross-bar. "Storm racin' in on us faster'n double-skairt jackrabbit."

Sunrise struggled in the east next morning. The sky was laced with thin, wavering cloud tresses. The crew bunched outside the kitchen as they wet down the last pancake with heavy coffee. All looked at storm sign but nobody ventured comment.

"Let's string 'em out," said Steve Capps, shortly. Andy had said to have the feeders at Two-step at a certain hour. They'd be there by a certain hour.

JETS of blizzard breath puffed and blew around them as they drove the herd through the break in the hogback and got them strung out. Over

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the second ridge, where plows had torn up range grass in a hazardous gamble at wheat farming, dust fogged and billowed across the road. The lowing of the steers was an eerie sound as the wind caught it and flung it away into the streaming air. Storm was in the sky, thick, tight-held and heavy. First blizzard.

The sun darkened until it was a cloud-smutted disk. Still no snow. Just wind, washing from mountains out over the treeless grass land hills. Wind, with storm in a few minutes, or a few hours, or next week; nobody could be sure.

Hub, with Dawn bundled into the seat beside him, drove up in the ranch truck, talked to Capps, passed the herd, and went on to meet Andy when the train came in.

"It's coming sooner'n expected," said Capps. "Hammer 'em; whack 'em along. Past the next ridge, we can turn our tails to the wind and drift right into town."

The sky became leaden. Blizzard was riding out from white infernos of the Arctic. The first bad storm of the season. Capps came riding, his windward cheek protected by upturned mackinaw collar. He pulled in beside Hi Lowe.

"That rodeo stock's still in the south pasture," said Capps. "It's awful open there."

"Want me to go back and run 'em into the feed lots?" asked Hi.

There was a lull in the pouring, roaring wind. Capps could talk in a moderate voice. "Casey and Irby got to go on in case Andy and his man want to ship right away to Collins." Capps was reasoning aloud. "Sixty Jones not strong enough yet to fight storm if it caught him before he got home. Those others—well, Mel's an arena clown, Cross-bar's a contestant, and Hack Nash is a champion bulldogger." There was an edge of contempt in Capps' voice; the little edge that range men feel when looking on cowhands that have become more show-men than range riders—a contempt always tinged with real envy. "I know," finished Capps, looking at Hi, "that if I send you, you'll see that stock gets taken care of spite of anything."

"*Bueno,*" agreed Hi, shortly, and turned back.

It was all right. In the wild wash of the storm he could get himself all set to carry out whatever a showdown with Andy might bring. He'd do any task to be done. Then ride. Get out of the country. *Bueno.*

Hard, gritty snow shot over the edge of the break in the hogback as he rode in between the cliffs. The sky had gone. The clouds were gone. Daylight was going colorless. The air was full of flakes, carried parallel above the earth. He rode out west of the sheltering cliffs, and had to bend against the wind's force. He kicked his horse into a run, passed the house. Mom was there. Smoke was streaking out flat from the kitchen's chimney. He rode on, and turned south toward the creek ford. He expected to see the dark bunched huddle of horses at the gate, waiting to get back to the barns and sheds.

He reined in sharply.

No horses bunched at the gate. But dimly seen, against the fresh skin of white spread over the piney ridge, he saw the line of horses, heads down, backs to the wind, drifting, doggedly, up near a saddle in the low ridge, hunting shelter since no man had come to clear the way so they might get back to ranch barns.

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One man, one saddle animal to turn that storm-whipped drift.

HI got a fence tool and put it in a saddle pocket. If he couldn't get them through the gate, he could cut the fence. Even as he looked southward the pine-decked ridge faded, and the dark line of traveling horses seemed to hang queerly like a jointed, slow twisting snake crawling over a white expanse. Then it also disappeared.

His pony was at a fast trot as he came thrashing out of the thick smother and almost ran into the rear guard of that storm-driven file of animals.

A horse snorted, jumped, floundered away in the storm. The line caught the fever, and stampeded over the piney ridge, frantically running. Hi set spurs, yelled, tried to head them as they hit the southward slope, but they went wildly scattering through the open pine stands and he lost all but a few; and then the storm swallowed them. The air was a soupy, white hell.

Fast fading tracks in the snow led him to where they had bunched. He got them moving westerly along the south boundary fence. The fence jammed into cliffs. The horses stacked up and milled. He attempted to drive them north. Buttercup, the mule, dodged, charged, got by him, and the others, shapes in a spumy wash of blizzard, floundered away like dark ghosts in an early twilight.

He tried again, failed as before, then cut out a small bunch he thought he could handle, hoping others would follow, and drove them directly north. He got them as far as the ridge top. There they faced the smashing wind, hesitated, turned, and when he tried to hold them, they charged by, snorting. He tried that three times; then sat, shaken, jolted, freezing, back at the place where the storm harried horses and that one stubborn mule crowded hard against the southern fence.

Hi got down stiffly, one hand holding reins of his own horse, while he cut wire with the fence tool.

It was drift—or die. Drift, or death would take those famous broncs, those fine-blooded racing and saddle ponies. Drift, or Andy Wallace would not fill next year's contract at the big New York show.

Buttercup took the lead, a Roman-nosed bronc following. Hi Lowe brought up the rear. The storm came in gasps now, great gasps, and breathy gusts, that ripped and tore at lungs. Snow cut as it sprayed from the north. Hi rode the drag and prayed that that keggy-headed mule in the lead knew where she was going—if she was going anywhere except away from the blow.

Hi cut another fence. Buttercup tossed her head and trotted through. Horses followed. And as each new rod of white trail passed, the blizzard howled higher.

Drift or die. Drift—and maybe at the end death, white death.

Hi Lowe lost track of distance. And time was engulfed in white and cold. He felt stupor creep on him and he shook it off. So much snow was pouring down it was slowing travel. If that fool Buttercup knew any shelter she'd better find it.

FANTASTIC shadows in the white were storm-whipped pines. Or cliffs with heads lost in the smother of higher storm. Shelter, these, but risky. The snow was drifting. Buttercup plodded on. All were plodding now, heads low, as though

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they had to shoulder into the storm. And Hi Lowe was bowed against the wind and the white hell it blew around him.

He kicked his horse as the pony stopped. Kicked again, and the horse stepped only a pace or two. Hi looked up.

They were at a cluster of sheds, some pole corrals—shelter. Buttercup was looking around at him, questioningly. They had reached the old sheds at Blue Cliffs. Hi had heard the other ranch hands talking about them. There could be no other ranch, this direction from Andy's Fork. He barely sensed the fact that he was into the forbidden range as he got stiffly from the horse and opened the gate. He'd lost thought of that back somewhere in the swirling storm. Snorting broncs tossed their heads, milled by, into the open-face sheds. Forbidden range, but sanctuary now.

He broke the lock on the cow camp cabin, fumbled as he built fire, and stared dully at the room. It seemed very familiar; like scores of other homestead and cow-camp cabins he had been in on far ranges.

He found coffee in a tin-lined cupboard and brewed a stout drink, then went to the sheds and tossed the only hay he found into the feed racks. His own food supply was more bountiful; mouldy dried apricots, salt side hanging from a sack wired to a rafter, and coffee without canned milk or sugar. He would have to drive the stock to feed as soon as the blizzard broke.

Through night hours, day hours, the world was whirling white, even nearby objects being blotted out in an immaculate hell. The third morning, sun came brilliantly. Glitter on the snow was blinding. Hi Lowe stepped out, blinked, shaded his eyes, looked up, to where two cliffs of blue limestone towered back of the cabin. He looked, and fought massive disbelief. He swayed, like a man who is struck.

He ran, then, heedlessly, slipping, falling, scrambling, past the log house, toward a little knoll below the cliffs, where a stout board fence boxed in a tiny plot of earth blown almost bare by blizzard that had swept the knoll's top. His hands gripped the top board of that fence, and he held on, like a man who has fallen into swift, deep water and found a timber that will float him through.

He turned, dazed and mumbling.

"That's it," he said aloud. "That's back of those orders—"

He stopped, suddenly, head up. He had to get back to the ranch.

HE was on a stumbling run as he left the bunk house. He stumbled but was past any running as he waded, on foot, breaking trail for the animals down the north slope of the piney ridge near the home ranch. He was staggering, and his vision was bleared and hazy from snowblindness. He broke trail only for himself after he got to the pasture gate. From there on the stock could go a few hundred steps to the barns. He turned, groggily, walked past the bunk house, on to the white house of the home ranch. He still was on his own power. That was about all. He had fought snow-locked trail all day. He had been carried relentlessly by the thought he must see Andy Wallace, see him now.

He stepped heavily, soddenly, into the dusky kitchen. A figure got up suddenly from the near table. He tried to see through the haze of his snow-blinded eyes. It was Dawn, and she smothered a sharp cry as she saw his

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wild, frost-rimmed face smudged with heavy beard stubble.

"Hi! Where were you? When did you get back? The stock?"

"Stock's all right. So'm I. Andy home?" His voice rasped.

"Upstairs, asleep. Dead tired. They were riding late last night, hunting you. Rode again today. The others are still out. Riding east on the plains. Dad came in nearly exhausted and is asleep."

"I've got to see him."

"Later, Hi. Later. You must be tired to death, too."

"I've got to see Andy Wallace. This can't wait."

"What's wrong?" She came closer. "Hi, what's wrong? You look as if —you'd seen a ghost."

"Yes," he said, and was whispering huskily. "Yes, I have. I found a tombstone at Blue Cliffs with my name on it!"

A moment froze into deathly, tragic waiting.

"There's no gravestones there with the name of Lowe." Dawn whispered it, and some way he knew she was fighting to keep steady.

"There's a tombstone at Blue Cliffs with the name of Bruce Freeman on it. My name, my real name."

"Bruce—Freeman?"

There was a queer, wailing disbelief in her cry, and fear.

"That isn't your name. That can't be your name. Your name is Hiram Lowe, and you're from Utah."

"Tombstone," he said huskily, "with my name, my father's name on it. Bruce Freeman. I remembered—when I saw the place. Remembered standing under the cliffs, beside open grave, two Utah uncles beside me. And they led me away. Only one grave then. Hers. Two headstones now—one with my name on it." He stopped, fighting against a blackening tide that was reaching up to gather him.

With a shake of his whole body he started by her. She caught him, jerked him to a stop.

"Where are you going?" He felt the panic that was in her.

"I've got to see your father. I've got to see Andy Wallace."

"No, Hi. No. You must not. Not now. You must not, I tell you!"

He made a queer, grating sound, half cough, and jerked free from her. Started toward the doorway into the main house. She got to the door, closed it, stood against it.

"You can't go up there." Her voice was ragged. He started. "Hi," she whispered, "something terrible will happen if you tell him this—something."

HE fought the groggy, dizzy fatigue that was reaching out to drag him down. The blindness that was hazing his eyes.

He took an uncertain half step.

"If you love me," she said, and there was a quick, shearing sob in it. "If you love me, Hi, you'll wait."

"Wait?" He had not thought of waiting. "Wait? Why?"

"This will work out. My father must not know that you found those names there. That you're Bruce Freeman. *He must not know.*"

"I've got to talk to Andrew Wallace."

"If you do, we'll be driven apart. Old trouble will come between us, drive us away from each other. If you wait—" Her voice caught, and then she swept forward a pace, to stand close, before him. "My dear, my dear," she said, and she did not know

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she used the word, but he heard it and wondered. "If you can be patient—you've got to be patient. This will work out. We can work it out. You're in no condition to talk to my father about this now. He's not in a condition to talk to you reasonably. He's got to see how you've got back on your feet. He's got to like you, Hi. But if you go up there now, like this, something will surely come between us."

"What?"

"I don't know, exactly. Something. Something terrible. For he hates even the name of Freeman. That's why we've got to wait, until we can be sure what we are doing. Promise that you'll not talk this to him until I give the word."

He stood, swaying.

"If you love me." She said it softly. Steadily. Pleadingly.

He was vainly trying to see her. A sick feeling, new blackness, more bleary haziness before his eyes were dragging at him.

"I'll wait," he said huskily, and turned, heavily, walking to the door, stolidly as he fought back to where he could get down in his bunk and rest until this black sickness would pass.

He did not know that he shook her off when she tried to stop him. Did not know that he cursed her with queer, rasping oaths. Nor that she drew back suddenly white, scared, afraid of him. He was sick beyond endurance and he was fighting to reach his bunk before he toppled.

He stumbled a little as he left the porch, stumbled again as he climbed, laboriously, up the one step to the bunk house porch, but he made it, all the way.

As Dawn Wallace stood watching, wondering, hurt and baffled, the words of Steve Capps came back with numbing force.

"If you're in love with each other—God have mercy on you both!"

Any significance in that memory was washed aside by the realization that Hi Lowe needed help, desperately, and she must give it.

She turned, calling for Mom Peters to get raw potatoes for snow-blinded eyes, brandy for a stimulant, cloths for a snow pack that would pull frost from Hi's frozen cheek.

If an arena man lost his luck, he's done; but if his luck's with him, he isn't down, nor out—not by a long shot, he isn't.

CHAPTER XII.

WAITING MYSTERY.

STEVE CAPPS reached the open door, took a hitch in himself, pants and shoulders, then stepped into the lamplit room. Andy Wallace looked from behind an oak table littered with papers, stockmen's journals, correspondence, and one set of fancy spurs tossed on letters as paper weights.

"Close that door and sit down," Andy ordered. He finished adding a column of figures in a small, red-backed memo book that he held open near the kerosene lamp. It was the tally book for the 2 B Joined brand; one of several registered in Andy's name. Stockmen often keep each brand they own in separate books. It is handier if they ever want to "sell the brand" and stock carrying it.

Capps lolled in a red plush chair with cowhorn arms and waited; Andy thrust the red tally book into a desk drawer. The lamp-light softened his deep-pitted face somewhat, but his

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shaggy brows made shadows that almost masked his eyes. The old man chewed his lip thoughtfully.

"Lowe was in the saddle all afternoon," he said.

"He's good as new," replied Capps. "Hard as nails. He seasoned his muscles around here this fall. He's fit, or he'd not got up so soon after breaking trail from Blue Cliffs for those animals."

Andy nodded. He was preoccupied. Finally he said, "You told me the other day the sign was clear."

"Plain as day." Capps made a smoke thoughtfully. "We got into Blue Cliffs about noon; Lowe had pulled out early morning. No wind had drifted the snow. I didn't tell you, I guess, how far we followed those horse tracks out on the plains, before we decided that bunch wasn't ours. I believe those were horses from—"

"Never mind where from," cut in Andy. "Tell me again about that sign at Blue Cliffs."

"He climbed the knoll. He stood by the fence a little while. I saw that, then I smeared the sign so others wouldn't read it."

"Cross-bar's the only one who's been here long enough to remember anything. Mel and Hack came after talk of that old trouble died out."

"Talk of such things does die out."

"But the things keep alive other ways," said Andy gruffly.

"Yes," agreed Capps. "Yes, they do. When men live to keep 'em alive."

ANDY stared. "There's one thing about you, Steve," said Andy after a moment. "You have a knack of tending to business, taking orders, carrying 'em out, and—not chewing the rag about 'em. At times I'm eternally grateful you're this way."

"You wouldn't expect me to talk this to anybody else."

"Nope. Nope, I sure wouldn't." Andy chewed, then caught his lip tight and held it between his teeth. "Only to me. But I can't understand. Lowe's been up and around a week, and he's not come to me to thrash this to a showdown. He read those names. I've been expecting him to break loose most any hour."

"I've learned, this fall, that he's a fellow who can wait."

Andy stared a moment. "Then he's not the rodeo bum I've seen in the arenas. He's changed. Hi Lowe used to wait neither on man nor devil."

"He's changed," said Capps. "The fat's burned out of his mind and body. He's got his head up. He's got hold of himself."

"Thank God for that," said Andy emphatically, and Capps stared with eyes suddenly wide. After a moment Andy said, "If it took this ranch, I'd save him from going to smash like he was. I mean it, Steve." Andy hit the top of the desk a slow, thudding blow with heavy fist. "I mean every word of that. You just speculate all you damn want to about my motives. I mean what I just said."

After a while Steve Capps said, "You've fought something inside of you ever since I've known you. I've wondered, sometimes, what could tear such hell through you. Maybe this is it. But — it's none of my business. Not until you make it so."

"I never will, Steve. This ain't between you and me."

Capps nodded, and said again, "Lowe can wait out a game with anyone."

"So can I," stated Andy sharply. He got up, stood before the unshaded

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window, staring toward the night covered, short grass hills. He said, without turning, "We'll let this ride along. I'm no hand to force such things when I'm not driven to it. Let it ride; and that's orders."

Steve Capps sat loosely in the cowhorn chair a long time after Andy had stamped down the hall. Steve smoked and thought. More waiting would be hard to bear. But Andy gave orders and expected they'd be obeyed. These orders were plain. Steve blew out the light and headed toward bed.

A THREAD of strain shuttled into life at the ranch. It was a thin thread, but some felt it keenly. Dawn delayed as long as she could, then fell in step one day as Hi Lowe started toward the corrals.

"I've got to talk to you," she said when they came to the sun-warmed angle between barns and granary. He stopped as she halted.

Hi leaned against the side of the granary. She stood free, easy balanced. Boots, breeches, mackinaw only accented her plain beauty. She tilted up her chin, and wind brushed thready hair away from her cheeks.

"Those graves at Blue Cliffs; you said your parents—" She didn't finish, but searched his snow-burned features.

"I remembered the place when I saw it," he stated. "My mother died there. I was only a small kid then. My mother's folks hated my father, because he was a Gentile and he'd run away with my mother. Brought her to Wyoming. First thing I remember was living with my mother at the Blue Cliffs. Then she died, and her folks came and took me away. Gave me the name of Hiram Lowe. Hated even my father's name. Never told me but one thing about him."

"That?" she asked.

"Those relatives never let me forget it. Used it to humble me. I guess you're entitled to know." His eyes were steady, holding her gaze. "My father was killed when he tried to escape the State penitentiary. Just that. Never learned what he was in for; just that he was shot down."

He saw blood drain until her lips were white. Shadows deepened in her eyes. "I can tell you why," said Dawn a little raggedly.

He looked toward the piney ridge and waited. She began in a low voice. Not speaking deliberately, as he had that night Indian Summer moon poured silver on the world. Dawn's sentences were jerky, and hurried.

Andy Wallace was first into Kettle River country. He had homesteaded, bought railway sections, and consolidated the ranch on Andy's Fork. The key to range in the short grass hills far south was Blue Cliffs and its living waters. He had used that, but before Andy could accumulate additional money to get title to it, others filed on it.

"My folks," said Hi.

"Yes," breathed Dawn. "And two factions formed. Your father led the dryland people. My father was leader among the larger stock outfits. There was range fighting. A man was killed. They convicted your father for that."

"Can't remember," breathed Hi. "Recollect mother cried a heap. We must have lived at the ranch, she and I, maybe a year or so, just the two of us. Who did they claim my father killed?"

"I don't know," Dawn declared. "I've never heard. This is something nobody talks around here. We've learned not to. When Hub and I were tiny tots, old timers sometimes came,

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and would try to talk with father about that trouble, but he would curse them until he was breathless, his face white, and then our visitors would go, hurrying, and not come back.

"My dad would tramp out of the house hatless, and stare up Andy's Fork, toward the mountains. I don't believe he recognized anything he looked at when he was that angry. Hub and I would hide under the bed, and whisper. Mom Peters would coax us out with cookies. We'd ask her what it was about. She didn't know. We were all scared. I remember all this from those first days. There's been no talk about this around here for a long time. But I had to tell you."

COWS bawled in the feed lots, and the windmill screeched. One of the ranch dogs barked beyond the corrals. Hi did not hear. He scowled at the piney ridge. This explained, maybe, flashes of hatred he'd seen in Andy's eyes, was some sort of a key to why he had been told to stay out of the 2 B Joined range. He turned to Dawn. She might know a reason for Andy's orders and Capps' determination in seeing they were carried out.

"I'm scared to death," she whispered. "It always has frightened me maybe because I always got so scared when I was little."

"Steady now," he said. He got hold of her hands. It was no time to add more to her fright by asking questions.

"Hi, does anybody know about your seeing those headstones?"

"I don't believe so," said Hi, slowly. "Unless Capps—"

"You'd have had some sign by now if Steve Capps knew you'd seen those stones and recognized those names as belonging to your folks, Hi," she said, a little fiercely, and he heard new sureness come into her words. "We're still able to see this through like I've planned. My dad's going to learn to like Hiram Lowe from Utah; like him for himself, without this old trouble preventing it.

"Hi, we can see this through; you'll wait, and not upset things; we can see it through!"

She whirled, abruptly, as though she could not speak another syllable, and ran towards the house.

Hi stood scowling.

Certain facts came to demand consideration. It was plain certain that Andy Wallace had learned that Hiram Lowe was Bruce Freeman that day Anse Bagwell had sneeringly declared Hi's father was a convict, killed in an attempted prison escape. There was no certainty that anyone at Andy's Fork other than the old man and Dawn knew Hi was Bruce Freeman. Capps, when he blocked Hi from going into the Blue Cliffs country, had merely carried out Andy's orders; knew they were emphatic, and used tactics to make them so.

It was old memories, old hatreds lashed up, that had flickered like smouldering fires in Andy's eyes and that Hi had seen.

Then why in God's name had Andrew Wallace, knowing who he was, hauled Hi Lowe off the skids and brought him here?

It didn't add up.

Andy Wallace played some game. Hi Lowe had pledged himself to play, with a good many of the cards blind. But a showdown would come. So let the play go to the last card. Hi Lowe still would be in the game.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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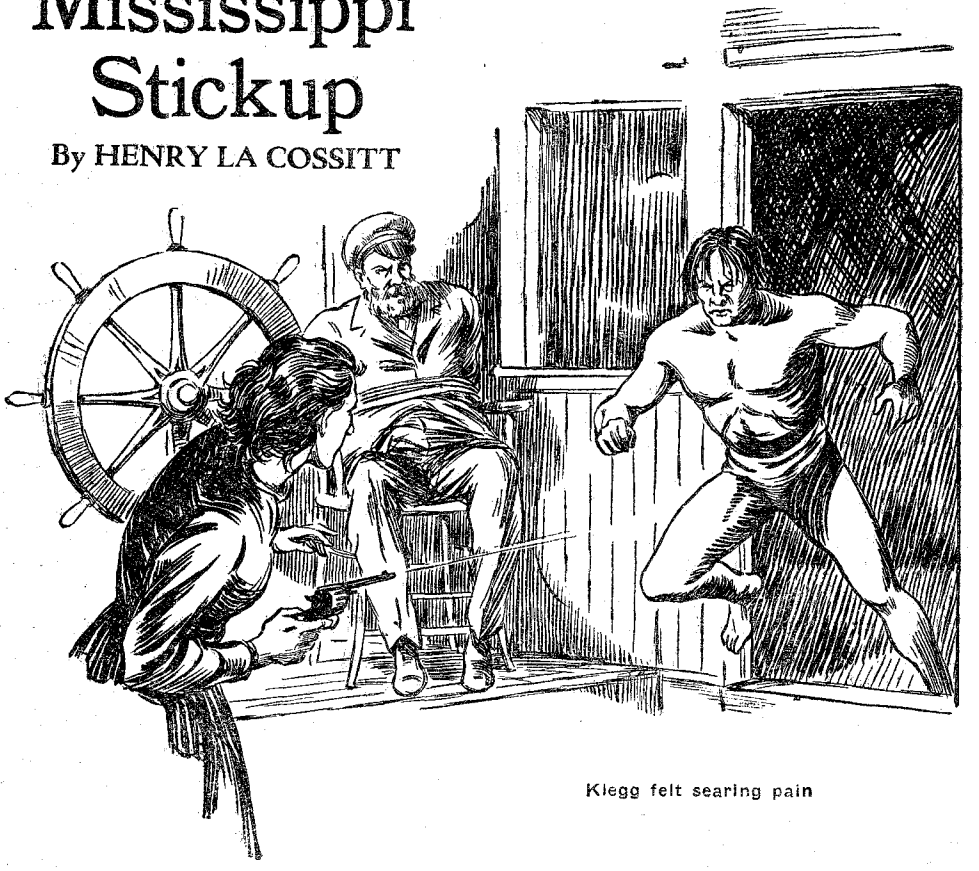
Silent Milt Klegg, river fisherman, was loyal to the core; and it was that loyalty which made a shrewd fighter of him

Mississippi Stickup

By HENRY LA COSSITT



Klegg felt searing pain

THE well-known characteristics of Milt Klegg, river rat, were three. First, he couldn't swim—couldn't swim far, that is. He could, of course, make a few rods, but more than that was doubtful. It was not because of any physical handicap; it simply was due to some strange quirk in his concept of things. Yet, like the pearl divers of the South Seas, like the coin divers of the West Indies, he knew his way about under water. He could do better, in fact, under water—as often is the case of the pearl divers and coin divers.

He could dive with all the grace of a seal and he could stay under an incredibly long time. Yet, although he knew the idiosyncrasies of the Mississippi as well as an accomplished horseman knows the temperament of a favorite mount, and although he could, with a boat, negotiate it with consummate skill, he still could not swim far along the surface. Never had he really needed to know how.

He was not a large man, but wiry, his tendons and sinews like wound steel. His face was grim, his cheekbones high, his eyes keen and black. His hair was coarse and stiff, his nose high-bridged, his mouth taciturn. His entire body was burned to a deep, walnut brown.

Somewhere, in his not remote ancestry, there had been an original American, which

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probably accounted for the second of his well known characteristics. This was that Milt shunned mankind in general and that only on rare occasions—very rare indeed—was he known to have said anything.

Milt lived all alone—fishing for his living, carving curious little things of wood for his recreation—on an island of made land, a sliver of earth overgrown with willows and scrub pine, in a shanty he had built of the flotsam that came slipping from the main current into the backwash along his shore. It was lonely country. Across the slough, the Illinois mainland was deserted, out of cultivation, practically uninhabited, but that suited Milt precisely.

The river had made the island; the river was now engaged in destroying its creation. The current, having changed because of a combination of minute circumstances prevalent as far up, perhaps, as Itasca, now swung from the Missouri shore across the river and against the island. Daily, now, the low mud cliff that was the high, precipitous bank, retreated as the soil and the willows sloughed off with a strange, sighing sound into the sucking waters. Before long, Milt's island would be cut in two.

But this did not worry him. With the sure instinct of the primitive, he knew when that would be and waited the precise moment of departure. Then he would row up, or down, according to whim, for life was quite simple for Milt. Although St. Louis lay less than a hundred miles above, he never had been there; Cloudbank, just below on the Missouri side, was his metropolis. Tiny village though it was, it supplied him with whatever was not forthcoming from the woods and river. When he needed axe, knife, net, he rowed down with a splendid mess of fish and bartered.

It was a summer's afternoon and Milt was diving for catfish in the slough. Across the river the sun hung lazily over Missouri. To the east, a storm brooded over Illinois. In the slough the water was quiet and cool. The slough was about thirty yards across. Milt, clad only in a crude, tight-fitting loin cloth—worn only for convenience—would dive, knife in his teeth, and explore the depths of the slough, his wiry body writhing through the water like an eel.

He could, of course, have caught many catfish with net or line, or he even, with uncanny skill, could have hit a few by throwing his knife, but such were not large enough. He was looking for the bigger fellows of the deeper water.

When he dived, his snapping eyes opened, searching the murky water as he slipped along. Because of suspended matter, he could not see the fish, but he could follow it by the clouds of disturbance it made in the turbid water. And when it nosed into brush, or under a log, he caught it.

His practiced hands sought the gills; his wiry fingers slipped into the gills; then, rising to the surface, he stunned it with the hilt of his knife and took it across to a pool he had made in the sand on his island.

So far, he had three. He could catch one more.

NOW in the usual course of his life, Milt would not have been so engaged. In the first place, it was useless, as far as he was concerned; but these fish were to be a gift. They were for Capt. Jimson, of the *Tennessee,* a towboat plying between St. Louis and New Orleans, towing great steel barges.

Several times a week, the boats and tows passed Milt's island, bound up or down the river. There would be, literally, acres of barges, loaded with thousands of tons of freight, towed—that is, pushed by boats such as the *Tennessee,* and tonight the *Tennessee* was due.

Sometime, just after sundown, she would round the bend just above, come charging down, almost three acres afloat, towards the island, following the channel, only to swing, when incredibly close to the caving bank, back in a diagonal course towards Missouri. At the next bend, Milt knew, Capt. Jimson would tie up for the night. He would flank the bend, slip into the quiet water along the Missouri bank, put out his lines to huge maples and willows along the shore and stay there.

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Whenever he thought of Capt. Jimson, strange emotions stirred the little fisherman. He thought of the time when stabbing pain cut through his bowels, when none of the herb remedies he had known since childhood would be sufficient to alleviate the pain.

He thought of how he had lain in agony, growing weaker and weaker, his fire burning on the shore in the hope that someone might see and come to aid him. He thought of how he had dragged himself to the river to die, because he loved the river, and how, suddenly, a skiff had appeared through the mist of his pain and a great gentle man had lifted him and carried him to the skiff and then to a steamboat, to nurse him and give him something that brought blessed sleep.

And how he had awakened in a cool, white place with the pain gone.

That Milt had been to a hospital, that a doctor had taken care of him, and that the great, gentle man had made this possible by paying for it, the little fisherman understood well enough. That he had had appendicitis and peritonitis he understood vaguely, without knowing the names, but what he understood vividly was that, to the great, gentle man, he owed his life.

The great, gentle man was Capt. Jimson.

Therefore, whenever Capt. Jimson passed his island, Milt always rowed out and delivered a couple of hundred pounds of luscious channel catfish to him and his crew. Sometimes, he brought little wood carvings, but always he brought the fish. It was the least and the most he could do to show his gratitude, for he adored Capt. Jimson. This was the third of his well known characteristics.

The summer air was soft and lulling; it was still, wonderfully still, in the slough. Far off, he heard the murmur of voices, but because of the vastness of the river, could not place them. He supposed someone was paddling along the other side of his island, but he paid little attention, because he was thinking, pleasurably, of Capt. Jimson.

A thunderclap roused him. It grumbled low over the Illinois flats, came rolling across the river to pound and reverberate and die away over Missouri. Milt shook himself, looked at the sun, saw that the afternoon was sinking, waded into the slough and dived.

For a moment he saw nothing; then an enormous catfish crossed his eyes. It swerved abruptly, made off down the slough, leaving a trail that resembled clouds of dust behind a speeding automobile. The fish kept straight down the slough for a distance. Milt came up, breathed, dived again. This time, he saw the fish head towards the shore of the mainland, where a large willow had fallen out across the lower end of the slough when the river, in some past flood, had cut away the bank beneath it.

MILT dived beneath the tree, sought and found the fish. He came up with it, stunned it, turned to make his way across to his island again, but stopped, senses alert. His free hand reached out, caught a branch of the tree. Stealthily, he let the catfish slip back into the water; stealthily, he climbed up the bank. He crept through tall grass, there, worked around to some brush that grew within a thicket of trees and peered into the trees.

Two men and a woman sat there, leaning against the trees. They were talking earnestly. It was their voices that he had heard several minutes before.

Now ordinarily, Milt would not have been interested. He would have avoided them, taken his fish and returned to his island, but as he had come up beneath the tree, he had heard a name. One of the men had pronounced this name, and the name was Jimson.

Milt studied them. He knew them. They were squatters who lived outside the levee on the Missouri side, eking a precarious living in corn. The men, whom he knew to be brothers, were of uncertain age, gaunt, sullen, brown, clad in blue jeans, blue shirts and rough brogans. Their slouch felt hats were dark and rotten with sweat. One of them had a long knife scar in his left cheek.

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Their name, Milt knew, was Kurd. The one with the scar was Bart, the other Cy. They chewed tobacco as a cow ruminates on a cud and they seemed doubtful about something, but not so the woman.

She was brown of skin, with dark, malevolent eyes and a cruel mouth and wore a straw hat and faded calico dress. There were vestiges of good looks about her face not entirely obliterated by the viciousness that was part of her character.

"Ye ain't got no blood in yore veins, Cy Kurd—" that was his wife, Milt knew—"an' ye never had'r we'd not be rootin' in the mud yonder in Mizzoory f'r a livin'."

She spat with disgust. Bart Kurd looked at his brother, fingered his scar and spat himself.

"I ain't sartin," said Cy sullenly. He kept his weak eyes on the ground. "I ain't sartin, that's all they is to it!"

"Sartin!" The woman swore. "Ye never was sartin o' nothin' yore whole wuthless life. Ye got no guts, Cy Kurd!"

Bart watched his sister-in-law thoughtfully.

"Tildy," he said slyly, "'tain't's if I ain't willin'." He spoke with a certain smoothness. "It's I ain't seein' yet why we got a call to go so far f'r yore brother, Joe." He rubbed his scar. "I only got one skin, Tildy, an' I ain't riskin' it only 'cause yore brother's got a grudge agin Jimson. 'Tain't horsesense."

Tildy laughed. "Ye got more sense than Cy, but still ye ain't got enough. Hell, 'tain't's if I care 'bout Joe's grudge. What if Jimson did kick him off'n the river lines f'r stealin'? I ain't carin' no more'n ye're carin'. But I ain't carin' 'bout Jimson, neither. 'F Joe kills Jimson 'tain't none o' my never mind. But we—we got somethin' to gain, I tell ye! We got the chanst to git rich in this. We got the chanst to fix ourselves f'r life."

She paused for her words to take effect. Cy Kurd looked up, his weak eyes glowing at the mention of riches. Bart, stronger than his brother, fingered his scar absently, his sullen eyes narrow as he watched his sister-in-law.

"We ain't got no chanst o' losin'," she continued. "Joe's got it all figgered. Jimson'll shorely tie up past yonder bend tonight 'count o' that storm comin' out o' Illinoize.

"They's bad river below anyways an' 'tain't no fun in good weather, but tonight he'll be bound. 'Sides, he ain't due in Cairo 'til Wednesday an' here 'tis only Monday. He'll run tomorra night an' be in Little Egypt by noon Wednesday."

SHE paused again. They were listening intently.

"Well, then, Jimson ties up. I go aboard an' talk with him. Him an' them pilots an' the cub an' the mate an' the radio man an' maybe a couple o' engineers'll be in a poker game in the s'loon like always. The crew'll be for'rd, lyin' 'round the bitts an' chucks, maybe drinkin'. So I call out Jimson. I tell him I got a sick baby an' that maybe he's got some med'cine. Then's when ye'll do it. Joe'll do his part, too. One o' ye throws down on the crew with yore guns an' herds 'em all in the engine room, where ye lock 'em in. The other'll take care o' those above an' lock 'em in the s'loon. Joe takes Jimson up to the pilot house, after wreckin' the radio where him an' me c'n work on him 'bout the money, an' we got ways."

She smiled, then. "They's ten thousand dollars 'board the *Tennessee*, boys. Ten thousand dollars! An' it'll all be our'n!"

She jumped to her feet, removed some snuff from her mouth and threw it on the ground. The brothers looked at her with blazing eyes. In his thicket, Milt lay motionless, his bare brown body blending curiously with the brush. He shivered a little, only partly because he was naked and because the storm was coming closer.

But Bart, the smooth one, asked: "How's it happen they got all that money aboard, Tildy? 'Tain't usual."

"Hell, no!" she snapped. "'Tain't usual. But Jimson likes cash. Joe's been up to St. Looie an' found out. Jimson's takin' the cash to Memphis f'r to put in a bank. He likes it that way. Ten thou-

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sand dollars! In cash! Every lick spittin' penny of it! An' we git it an' take the old Ford an' light out f'r Arkinsaw where we'll lie up in the swamps 'til it blows over."

For a moment there was silence. Thunder pounded closely, preceded by a wind that swept across the river. Across the great stream, the sun fell down the sky towards the rolling horizon. Cy Kurd cleared his throat, spat.

"Yore brother Joe, Tildy," he said, his weak eyes cunning. "How much's he figgerin' on cuttin' out o' this?"

"How much?" Tildy laughed. She walked to where her husband sat and looked down at him. "Ye're showin' the first sense I ever seen ye show. He ain't cuttin' nothin'! Nothin', I tell ye both! When he's cut Jimson's throat like he says he's bound to do, he's quits. He ain't knowin' it, but he shore is. Why, hell! They're hangin' men in Mizzoury these days f'r murder an' we're lettin' him know it."

"Ye think Joe'll stand f'r that?" asked Bart.

"Stand f'r it!" She laughed. "Why hell yes, he'll stand f'r it! . . . Bart, ye'll leave Joe to me when the job's done. He'll stand f'r it'r he'll git a knife 'tween his ribs one night. . . . Ye'll leave Joe to me, I say—" She broke off, staring through the woods. "Hold yore tongues, he's comin' now."

Milt Klegg, because he had been intent on the conversation, had not heard the rustle in the brush behind him. Now he turned, saw the approach of a squat, heavy-set man with loose features and started to crawl beneath a bush, but he was not quick enough. The heavy-set man yelled, leaped, landed on him.

THE brutal impact shoved Milt's face against the ground, and just in time he let go the knife between his teeth. The knife fell beside his face an instant before his nose ploughed into the dirt. The next instant he was jerked to his feet, sent reeling into the midst of the Kurds by a heavy blow on his neck.

Stunned, when he came to his senses, the Kurds held him tightly.

"Lyin' there spyin', he was!" shouted Joe. "I seen him's he was tryin' to crawl off!"

Joe's face was livid. His small, colorless eyes burned with his rage. Suddenly, he struck Milt heavily in the face. Milt's head bobbed, but he said nothing. His black eyes, steady as those of a snake, merely held the heavy man.

"Damn Injun!" spat Joe. He drew back his fist again.

"Stop it, Joe!" commanded Tildy. "Shet up!"

She walked close to Milt, her eyes studying him. The brothers watched her for a signal.

"How much'd he hear, now?" she said, as if thinking aloud. Then, to Milt: "How long ye been there, Milt?"

"He's Jimson's friend," said Cy.

"Jimson done him a good turn, wunst," said Bart. "He's always takin' fish out to Jimson when the *Tennessee* comes by."

"He'll shorely tell Jimson," said Joe. He drew his knife. "Here—"

But his sister shoved him away. "Milt," she repeated, "how long ye been lyin' there? I said!"

But the fisherman said nothing. He did not even look at the woman. His eyes were still on Joe. Before the almost unwinking gaze, the man grew uneasy. Milt's eyes glowed with dark fire.

"Hell!" said Cy nervously. "'F he's hearn us, it's bad."

"Maybe not," said the smooth Bart. "We c'n fix it so's he won't say nothin', maybe. We c'n always leave him lower'n the ground there on his island. Nobody ever comes to it 'cept him, anyways. Ain't that so, Tildy?"

"Hell!" said Joe. "Stick him an' heave him in the river!"

"Joe," said Tildy, "ye ain't right bright. A fool knows a dead body comes up. That ain't it." She looked at the fisherman. "Milt, ye'd orta knowed better, ortn' ye?"

But Milt still said nothing. He still held Joe with his strange eyes.

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"Damn him!" snapped Joe. He turned away.

Tildy laughed. She winked at the brothers. "Lissen!" she said. "Ye'll all be masked tonight, won't ye?" They nodded. "All 'cept me, an' I ain't carin'. They don't know me. Well, now this Injun's got a skift. We'll take it an' leave ourn. We'll tie it up to the *Tennessee* an' leave it there when we git away. We'll sink our skift in the slough, here. An' when they git out an' start lookin', the first thing they'll see's Milt's skift an' over they come, o' course. It'll give us more time."

"An' what do they find?" asked Cy nervously.

"Nothin'," she said. "Nothin' a-tall. Not Milt, anyways."

"Why not?" asked Bart.

"'Cause we're fixin' Milt so's they won't find him."

"That's sense," said Joe. He walked towards the fisherman again with his knife.

"Joe," snapped Tildy, "ye're bounden ye're gonna stick him, ain't ye? Well, I say ye ain't. Milt's gonna be learnt a lesson. Gimme some rope!"

THERE was some gear near one of the trees. Bart went over and got a coil of half-inch rope and handed it to his sister-in-law. It was old rope, had been much used.

"Put him agin yonder tree," she said, and when the brothers had shoved the fisherman against the tree: "Ye'll like this, Milt. Ye should know all 'bout it. Yore Injun relatives used to treat folks this way when they didn't like 'em . . . Tie him good an' tight, boys!"

They tied him, tied him cruelly. He stood stiffly against the tree. Almost, his sinewy brown body seemed to merge with it.

"Where's yore skift, Milt?" asked Tildy. But Milt's taciturn mouth seemed eternally closed.

"Don't make no change," she said. "We'll find it. It's 'round the island somewheres."

She came up and peered at him, but the black eyes were unfathomable. Before their steady mystery even Tildy flinched.

"Damn ye!" she cried. "Don't ye never talk?" And when Milt still did not speak, did not change expression: "Talk, I said! Talk, damn ye!"

She hit him as hard as she could, but still he did not speak, did not change expression.

"Ye'll never git another chanst to talk, ye savage! Ye'll stand here dumb f'r many's the year 'less someone finds ye, which ain't likely, an' 'til the flies an' ants 've picked ye clean. Ye'll stand here with a gag in yore dirty mouth while the skeeters an' ants eat off'n ye an' so's ye c'n see yore river through the trees an' the boats goin' by an' do nothin' 'bout it. D'ye like it, ye spyin' friend o' Jimson's?"

Milt did not answer. "Goddelmighty!" She walked away, but turned. "Here ye are, boys," she said, more calmly now, and handed them a bandanna she had taken from her bosom. It was exactly like thousands of others in the river bottoms. "Put that in his mouth an' make it tight, 'n' to make shore put some rope around too."

They gagged him. He stood perfectly rigid now, his head held tightly against the tree by the rope around his face at his mouth. Yet his eyes did not change. Their black glow followed the four of them relentlessly.

"What'f he gits loose, Tildy?" asked Cy. He was afraid of Milt's black eyes.

"What'f he does? He can't swim none. Everyone knows that. An' they ain't no one in miles on this side. We'll be done our job 'n' off to Arkinsaw 'fore anything could happen. But he ain't gittin loose, I'm bound."

They left him. They trudged off through the brush and disappeared beyond the trees towards the river. Presently, he heard the creak of oarlocks and soon they hove in view, making for his island. He could see them as they drew up their skiff on its bank and as they entered the woods, there.

Across the river, now, the sun was gone. Twilight, hastened by the onrushing storm from the east, shrouded the further shore

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and fell lower over the immense river. Here and there, above the slough, in the trees of his island, in the trees about him, early fireflies winked. A mosquito whined. He thought of what Tildy had said about the mosquitoes.

All that she had said was true. Behind him, the Illinois flats were deserted. The only folk who came this way were the occasional hunters and fishermen, from the towns inland in Illinois, or from Cloudbank below. But their passings were infrequent. Besides, gagged as he was, bound as he was, none would notice him unless very close. Milt's body looked too much like the nature in which he lived.

THE twilight settled into darkness. Over Missouri the stars winked, but above, surging westward, the heavy black clouds of the storm hurried to blot out the sky. The wind, stronger, blew away the fireflies, kept the mosquitoes subdued.

That was fortunate for Milt, but he was not thinking of himself. He was thinking of Capt. Jimson. And almost since they had left him, his sinewy body had been moving. It writhed in queer sinuous movements, tireless and steady. His hands, bound behind him, moved up and down, up and down, rubbing the old rope against the bark of the tree. His body tightened and relaxed, stretching the rope infinitesimally, but stretching it nevertheless. Already it was a little looser, a little less painful.

He had heard them when they found his skiff, had heard them as they filled their own craft with rocks and sodden logs and when they had sunk it. His eyes had followed them in the murk, as they drew away from his island in his skiff, slipping down towards the Missouri side on their evil errand and his thoughts followed them.

But his body moved mechanically. Sweat stood out everywhere on his skin, mingling with the induced oil and made his lean sinews more slippery. There was a little looseness in the strands about his hands, now.

He contracted his muscles, tried to make himself smaller, worked his wrists back and forth. Fortunately, his skin was tough. Years of exposure to sun, to wind, to rain, to the water of the river, had cured his hide. For the moment the rope did not affect his wrists. Later, of course, he knew that his skin must be rubbed raw, but his efforts did not abate.

A large drop of rain fell in the growth about him with a loud, slapping sound, followed by a flurry of other drops, as the wind bore them in advance of the storm and then, with a terrific detonation of thunder and as the sky split asunder with an immense scar of lightning, it broke with all the fury peculiar to the valley.

A sheet of rain enveloped his wriggling body, drenching him, but he welcomed it. It made his skin all the more slippery, made the old rope less stiff and loosened it still more.

In the flashes he could see his river, lashed into great, gray waves that broke in ocean-like whitecaps as the wind struck at the water.

He could actually move his hands and wrists a little in the tight loops that held them, now, and presently something else was added to the lubricity of sweat and oil and rain—his blood. He had rubbed through his skin.

But he did not consider the pain. It only spurred him to greater efforts and then, suddenly, he began to work in a frenzy. This was because he had heard a short, braying sound, that rose above the hubbub of the storm and soared away down the river and across the flats.

It had sounded once, like a great cough, but its echo over the distances persisted in a long, drawn out wail that stirred the little fisherman.

It was the whistle of the *Tennessee*, blown by the pilot for the leadsman who would, as usual, sound on the port side as the boat came close to Milt's island.

THE rain was abating. He could see further, now, through the murk and the storm, out on the river and presently the tow hove in view. Silently, it

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came, a huge dark mass upon the bosom of the river, moving with a certain inevitability, like an island cast loose. It passed the head of his own island, ten barges lashed together, swung ponderously to point towards Missouri.

Then there were lights. The *Tennessee* itself, engines throbbing, came past, a dwarf pushing a giant ahead of it. The lights of the boat were gay in the dark loneliness of the storm and the river. In the saloon, the little fisherman could actually see the men lounging about.

The *Tennessee* passed, her lights dimming in the rain. Presently, with her vast tow, she was gone, swallowed in the immensity of river and storm.

And Milt worked on. Not once did he stop to rest, although his breath came in labored gusts and his body ached and his wrists flamed with pain.

But the old rope was growing steadily looser. . . .

It came so suddenly that it surprised him—one of his hands slipped loose and for a moment he relaxed against the tree. But only for a moment. Almost immediately, he was back at work again, loosing his other hand from the soggy rope, then his mouth from the torture of the gag. Then his feet.

He stood for a moment soothing his wounded wrists, then ran through the trees to the bank, looked downstream. Three miles or so, below, he saw the *Tennessee* against the Missouri shore.

She had stopped.

Milt turned, hurried back to the spot where he had lain listening to Tildy Kurd unfold her terrible plan, scrabbled about in the earth until he found his knife. Then he ran back to the tree where he had caught the fish, slipped into the water and made for his island with queer, clumsy strokes. But then he dived and when he came up he was at the narrow beach on the island.

He ran through the rain up the beach to where what looked like an ordinary log lay on the bank. It seemed partially covered by the sand, seemed no different from the thousands of similar logs that had been washed up on the banks of the Mississippi by sudden rises.

But it was different. It was about eight feet long and somewhere between two and three feet thick and there was a vague tapering towards its blunt ends, which had been crudely pointed with knife and axe.

Milt turned the log over, and the difference became obvious. On the nether side the log had been hewn flat. It had lain on this flat side in the sand and therefore, sinking slightly in the sand, had appeared to be half buried.

But most significant was the fact that, roughly midway between the ends of the flat surface was a cavity that had been hewn and whittled in the log. It was several feet long, over two feet wide.

Milt, accomplished at working with wood, had been making himself a dugout.

He dragged the log to the water, launched it, stood back to see how it rode. But he knew it would ride. He had tried it before. It would ride dangerously—doubly so, this night, with the river a boiling mass of waves—but it would ride, nevertheless.

He towed the log down the bank, hurried a little way across the sand and returned with a burden. The burden he deposited in the cavity. Then he towed the log to the lower end of his island.

HE dragged it around the end, up the river for a distance, then, with effortless agility, sprang into the cavity himself. For a moment he balanced on his bare feet, then sank to his knees, squatting on his heels. With his hands, then, he propelled the rude craft out into the river.

The waves sloshed over him, over the dugout, but with nice balance he held the log on, until, as if struck by some giant hand, the forward end swung around, gathered momentum and it shot down the river.

Tildy Kurd had counted on the first of Milt's well known characteristics in her plan. That he could not swim seemed adequate insurance against his interference, but Milt did not need to swim, did not even need oar or paddle. Knowing his river, he

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would, as usual, let the river itself work for him. And that he could do this, Tildy Kurd had forgotten.

The log rose, fell; it careened dangerously, a mere splinter, after all, shaken by the high waves, buffeted by the wind and rain, but the man riding it was practised. He held it balanced, held it in the middle of the current, his raw wrists and hands performing miracles in giving it added propulsion and in steering it.

Above him, the after-thunder growled low and sullen, great tearing reverberations that seemed directly above his head; the lightning was almost continuous, as if the heavens had been given over to some vast, pyrotechnical purpose; Milt seemed foolishly tiny, at the mercy of the elements.

But he was not at the mercy of the elements—he was using the elements to suit his purpose.

Milt swung the log out of the current into the quiet water in which the *Tennessee* lay. Noiselessly, he propelled down the stretch, alongside the boat. There, he grasped the edge of the lower deck, pulled himself along to midships. A little below, he saw, was his skiff, tied to the rail that ran around the lower deck.

He could hear nothing, for a moment, because his ears had been attuned to the roaring thunder, but presently he heard voices. They came from the engine room and they were angry, snarling, cursing.

The crew, then, had been penned there, according to plan. He pulled himself further, his head now just barely above the lower deck, until he came to the passageway aft the galley, between the galley and the crew quarters. There, he held his vigil for a moment, until, through the passage, he saw the nervous figure of Cy Kurd. The weak brother had been left below to guard the crew.

Milt let his log float down to where his skiff was tied, slid out of it, into the water, lifted the iron weight that was the skiff's anchor into the cavity, thereby making the log fast to the skiff.

Then he drew his knife from the loin cloth, where it had been thrust, placed it between his teeth, slipped from sight beneath the surface.

He came up in the shadow of the boat on the other side. Behind him rose the shore, dark, lined thickly with brush and trees. Here and there, he saw the lines that held the *Tennessee* and her tow secure. Above loomed the boat itself, a few lights burning.

CAUTIOUSLY, he raised his head, saw, a few feet down the deck, the figure of Cy Kurd. The squatter stood by one of the windows of the engine room, masked, looking down at the crew below. In one hand he held a revolver.

Milt slipped down along the boat, drew himself up on the lower deck. The squatter still looked through the window, oblivious. But some instinct, some sense shared only by those who live close to the soil, must have warned him and he turned his head.

He started and trembled, shocked into inaction at the sight of the grim savage-like man who stood naked before him and he only had time to cry out feebly before Milt, springing like a bobcat, was on him.

Cy Kurd remembered his gun, then, but Milt's knife slashed his hand and he dropped it. The knife hilt, deftly aimed, crashed against his temple and he dropped heavily, his bleeding head hanging over the protruding edge of the deck.

Milt wiped his knife on his bare leg and paused. Below was the crew, but it did not occur to him to liberate them. This thing endangered Capt. Jimson and Capt. Jimson was his friend. Milt was single-minded; he would do his job alone.

He crept along the deck to the passage aft the galley, darted into it, paused, listening, but no one, apparently, had heard Cy Kurd's feeble cry. In the middle of the passage he came to a stairway that led from the lower to the upper deck, where were the officers' quarters. But he passed this stairway, to emerge on the other side of the boat.

He stole aft, then, until he came to a steel stairway that rose to the upper deck. He climbed this slowly, stealthily, paused,

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near the top, to peer over. And he beheld, standing just outside the saloon, where the pilots and the others had been imprisoned, the masked figure of Bart Kurd.

Bart Kurd, unlike his brother, was alert, watchful and resolute. His eyes covered the deck, kept close watch on those within the saloon.

Milt, crouched there at the head of the stairway, his crown even with the deck, observed him for a moment, then drew his legs up another step, without raising his head or body.

Then, with all the strength in his wiry legs, he sprang. His leap carried him low across the deck to Bart Kurd before the squatter was aware of him. As he reached Bart Kurd, his knife flashed in the light that fell from the saloon windows and the squatter screamed, staggering, as the blade bit into the muscles of his calves.

He waved his arms, fired wildly in surprise and fear, as he started to fall, reeling towards the rail. The knife came up, slashed his arm. He fell against the rail, his gun clattering on the deck as the knife paralyzed his arm. And because there was a gap in the rail, there, and because the chain strung across the gap was low, he fell overboard.

At the sound of the shots the men in the saloon and in the engine room below had acted. Now they were swarming out on the deck, shouting. But almost before the sound of the splash of Bart Kurd's body had reached him, Milt was up the stairs, on the deck above, just outside the pilot house.

WITHIN the pilot house, he saw the figure of his great, gentle man, Capt. Jimson, tied in the raised chair in which he sat daily beside the pilot, watching the progress of his boat. And standing near by, her eyes starting in fear and rage, was Tildy Kurd. Beside her was Joe, masked. They held revolvers and knives.

The door to the pilot house was open. Within, a light burned, but outside, where Milt stood, there was no light. Joe started a rush towards the door, but stopped abruptly.

He reeled back, past his sister, the gun and knife he held clattering to the floor. He clawed at the knife buried hilt-deep in his chest, sighed heavily, sank to the floor and lay still.

For this man had meant to murder Capt. Jimson. To Milt, at least, the logic of the case was unanswerable. Therefore, he had thrown his knife and Milt could hit a swimming fish with his knife.

Milt ran through the door. Tildy Kurd, screaming, a harpy personified, fired. The fisherman felt pain sear his side, staggered sidewise a little, but, not heeding Capt. Jimson's warning shouts, kept on. He wanted his knife.

Tildy, her eyes maniacal, raised her gun again, but she did not fire it. The gun went flying across the pilot house as men pouring through the other door struck her arm, grabbed her and held her, struggling and clawing.

Men coming in the door behind Milt, hurried to Capt. Jimson, worked at freeing him from his bonds.

Milt knelt beside the body of the man he had killed. He tore the mask from Joe's face. Joe lay quite still, his colorless eyes staring at the ceiling. Milt drew his knife from the body, cleaned it on the dead man's shirt, stood up. Then he glanced at his side. He saw that the bullet had gouged it, had ploughed a groove just below his ribs, and was not bothered because he was bleeding.

About him, the men of the *Tennessee* stared, wondering. Tildy subdued now, looked at him with almost superstitious awe.

There he stood, naked, save for his loin cloth, his knife in his hand, his body stained with his own and others' blood.

His coarse black hair fell over his forehead, but could not hide the glitter of his keen, black eyes.

"Milt!" This was Capt. Jimson. He was a tall, powerful man with a kindly, weatherbeaten face. His eyes were deeply

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blue. He smiled as he towered over the little fisherman. "You saved my life, Milt. You saved my money." He patted Milt's shoulder, took Milt's hand and gripped it. "Why, Milt, you're hurt! Your side . . ."

All at once, the glitter left Milt's eyes. He seemed a little sheepish. He thrust his knife into the loin cloth, looked down at his torn side and shook his head. Over his grim face there filtered a wisp of a deprecating smile. He looked at Capt. Jimson, looked around the room, looked back at Capt. Jimson and shook his head again.

"Milt," the captain was saying, "if there's any question about the death of this scoundrel, here, we'll look after it. Don't worry about it."

THAT Milt had thought about this at all was improbable. It was doubtful if he understood the captain. To him, the case was closed, the affair ended. Capt. Jimson's enemy had been removed.

Suddenly, he darted out of the cabin. He hurried down the stairs, crossed the boat, noticed that some of the crew were fishing Bart Kurd, groaning and cursing, from the river, and ran to his skiff. Presently, he returned to the pilot house above, lugging a heavy burden.

The burden consisted of three enormous catfish, strung on a stick through the gills. He handed the fish to Capt. Jimson, who took them wonderingly. And then Milt spoke—one of those rare occasions.

He looked as if he were disappointed in something, which, indeed, he was, for the poundage of the fish was lighter than usual. He regretted the one he had been forced to abandon beneath the tree.

Then, before they could say more, he was gone. They stared at each other for a moment. Capt. Jimson, thrusting the fish at the nearest man, hurried out of the pilot house, hurried down to the lower deck, crossed to the other side of the boat.

"Milt!" he shouted. "Milt! Your wound! Milt . . ."

His voice died away in the vastness of the river. But then, straining his eyes and ears, he could hear the smooth dipping and rising of oars, could make out a moving object on the breast of the great river.

The storm was gone. He watched for a moment, as a full moon, incredibly huge, was disgorged from the horizon over Illinois. It looked like a visiting planet, enlarged as it was by the refractory haze. Against its sudden light, he could see Milt in the skiff.

The fisherman was rowing steadily upstream, avoiding the stronger current of the channel that had borne him earlier to the *Tennessee*, but presently would swerve, with sure knowledge, to head across to his island.

And then Capt. Jimson could see no more. Milt had vanished into the shadows, into the clucking, whispering silences of the Mississippi.

Capt. Jimson stood watching the river for a long time, then turned, shaking his head, to return above. What Milt had said, back in the pilot house, and had said as quietly as the river, surging on towards the sea, flowed, was, "I brung ye the fish."

THE END

The Shape of Speed

IF you tow a cake of soap through water at high speed, it will form a shape like a turtle's shell. The form assumed by a falling tear drop is the perfect streamline for high air speeds. Aircraft of the future and the lifting wings will be tear drop in shape.

—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*

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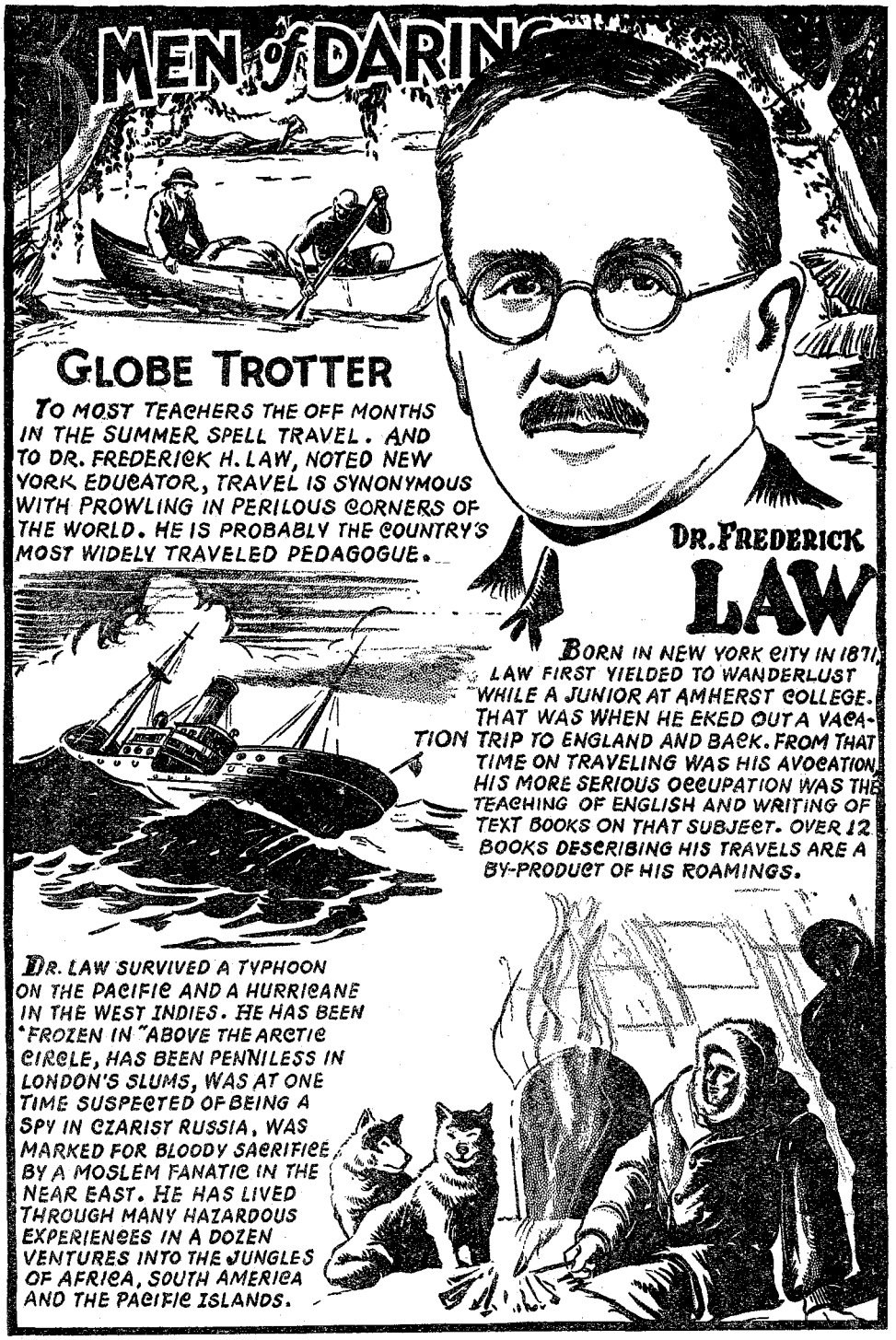
MEN of DARING
GLOBE TROTTER
TO MOST TEACHERS THE OFF MONTHS IN THE SUMMER SPELL TRAVEL. AND TO DR. FREDERICK H. LAW, NOTED NEW YORK EDUCATOR, TRAVEL IS SYNONYMOUS WITH PROWLING IN PERILOUS CORNERS OF THE WORLD. HE IS PROBABLY THE COUNTRY'S MOST WIDELY TRAVELED PEDAGOGUE.
DR. FREDERICK LAW
BORN IN NEW YORK CITY IN 1871, LAW FIRST YIELDED TO WANDERLUST WHILE A JUNIOR AT AMHERST COLLEGE. THAT WAS WHEN HE EKED OUT A VACATION TRIP TO ENGLAND AND BACK. FROM THAT TIME ON TRAVELING WAS HIS AVOCATION. HIS MORE SERIOUS OCCUPATION WAS THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AND WRITING OF TEXT BOOKS ON THAT SUBJECT. OVER 12 BOOKS DESCRIBING HIS TRAVELS ARE A BY-PRODUCT OF HIS ROAMINGS.
DR. LAW SURVIVED A TYPHOON ON THE PACIFIC AND A HURRICANE IN THE WEST INDIES. HE HAS BEEN "FROZEN IN "ABOVE THE ARCTIC CIRCLE, HAS BEEN PENNILESS IN LONDON'S SLUMS, WAS AT ONE TIME SUSPECTED OF BEING A SPY IN CZARIST RUSSIA, WAS MARKED FOR BLOODY SACRIFICE BY A MOSLEM FANATIC IN THE NEAR EAST. HE HAS LIVED THROUGH MANY HAZARDOUS EXPERIENCES IN A DOZEN VENTURES INTO THE JUNGLES OF AFRICA, SOUTH AMERICA AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

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UNARMED, THE ADVENTURE SEEKING TEACHER NEVER CARRIES ANYTHING MORE THAN A CAMERA ON HIS JOURNEYS. ONCE, IN THE FIJI ISLANDS, HE WAS CHASED BY TWO FEROCIOUS NATIVES ARMED WITH CLUBS. HE OUTRAN THEM, ONLY TO LAND IN THE VERY MIDST OF A WHOLE VILLAGE OF SAVAGES. SEEING HIS FINISH, DR. LAW ON A SUDDEN INSPIRATION TOOK TO ACTING THE CLOWN. HE SOMERSAULTED, STOOD ON HIS HEAD, MADE FUNNY FACES AND IMITATED A CHEER LEADER. THE SAVAGES WERE SO AMUSED AT HIS SLAPSTICKERY THAT THEY ACCEPTED HIM AS AN HONORED GUEST. HE WAS FEASTED, THEN THEY SENT HIM ON HIS WAY LOADED WITH GIFTS.
IN A 5 MONTHS' TRIP THROUGH AFRICA FROM CAPE TOWN TO CAIRO, IN 1926, DR. LAW TRAVELED THROUGH THE JUNGLES BY RAIL, STEAMER, DUG-OUT CANOE, RAFT, SAIL BOAT, BICYCLE, CAMEL AND ON FOOT. THE ONLY HUNTING HE DID WAS FOR CAMERA SHOTS. RETURNING IN PERFECT HEALTH DR. LAW DECLARED THAT WILD ANIMALS AND NATIVES HAD PROVED TO BE THE LEAST OF THE DANGERS ENCOUNTERED. THE GREATEST PERILS, HE EXPLAINED, WERE THE INVISIBLE ONES. "ONE MAY BREATHE OR DRINK DEADLY GERMS, OR BE BITTEN BY THE TSETSE FLY OR SOME POISONOUS INSECT OR SMALL SNAKE."
DR. LAW SPENT ALL OF ONE SUMMER PENETRATING THE BRITISH GUIANA BAD LANDS, INTO THE HEART OF THE FANTASTIC INTERIOR WHICH SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE WROTE ABOUT IN HIS "LOST WORLD". LAW MADE THE JOURNEY WITH 17 NATIVES PADDLING A SMALL BOAT HELPED ALONG BY A FORD ENGINE. HE MADE HIS WAY UP AND DOWN FIVE CONNECTING STREAMS, SHOOTING THE TREACHEROUS BOILING RAPIDS OF THE MAZARUNI, AND COMING SAFELY THROUGH THE SNAKE-INFESTED TERRITORY WHERE MANY OTHER BOLD PROSPECTORS HAVE DIED OF MALARIA ON THE WAY TO THE RICH DIAMOND FIELDS BEYOND.

Next Week: Capt. Charles Scully, Veteran Life Saver

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Midnight Taxi

By BORDEN CHASE

Carefully and cleverly Smooth Kyle had worked his way into a New York dope ring—so he could tear it apart

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

BY using his old trade of taxi driver as a blind, Federal Operative Smooth Kyle worked his way into the heart of Bet-a-Grand Rudd's New York dope ring. Backed by Chief McNeary and aided by Dorothy Manning, an actress who had joined the government ranks, Smooth had practically succeeded in blasting the gang of Rudd's chief rival, Big Spanish. There were still a few of that mob in circulation, however, and Smooth knew they spelled trouble.

With his plans practically completed, Smooth began a quiet round-up of Rudd's men. Rudd still believed Smooth was one of his trusted lieutenants.

The big coup was to come at night—the same evening Rudd had planned a party aboard his yacht, the Roulette. Smooth and Dorothy, Rudd and Gilda Garland, one of Rudd's women workers, were to go on the party.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRAP IS SET.

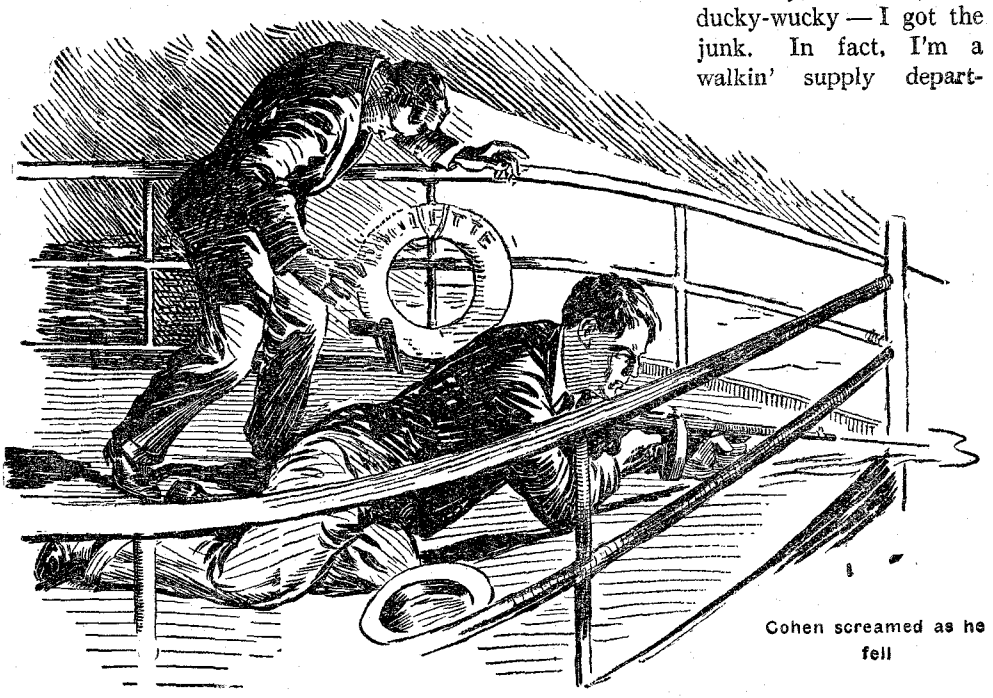
YITZ COHEN was standing on the hotel steps when Smooth rolled up to the curb. He grinned, climbed into the back of the cab and slammed the door.

"Ah—take me for a drive in the Park, me good man," he said. "Mind the bumps—me kidneys are weak."

"I'll bounce 'em outta your ears if you don't quit clownin'," snapped Smooth. "Got the stuff with you?"

"My word! What a saucy driver. I'll report you to my friend the commissioner. Such insolence from a cabby, no less!" He turned up one of the drop seats, crossed his feet on it and leaned back in a corner.

"Soitinly, Smooth, old ducky-wucky — I got the junk. In fact, I'm a walkin' supply depart-



Cohen screamed as he fell

This story began in the Argosy for October 12

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ment. An' just so I don't get the same deal that was handed to Tout Ender, would you mind doin' a few buck and wings through the traffic so we can lose any visitors that might be on our tail?"

"Good idea," said Smooth. "And, by the way—gimme my gun."

Cohen folded a newspaper about the automatic and handed it to Smooth, who dropped it into the holster and settled back in his seat. He doubled back and forth through the side streets, looked for traffic jams and threaded his way through hundreds of closely packed cabs, and at length was satisfied no one was trailing them. He cut across town and made his first stop at Eighth Avenue. The same mouse-faced individual who had eased from a restaurant and slid into the cab the previous day repeated the routine. He was a little surprised to find Cohen in the rear of the cab, but recognized him as one of Rudd's men and accepted the decks of cocaine.

Smooth drove slowly, knowing McNeary's men were waiting for the drop off. When the transaction was completed he stopped, opened the door and saw Ted Wade and Frank Garison follow the runner into a hallway. He smiled and stepped on the gas. Those two hard-boiled agents of the Bureau of Narcotics would waste little time with Mouse Face. A few doses of knuckle treatment and he would be hustled along to the central collection depot arranged for by McNeary. Then Wade and Garison would hurry to a point further along the route to repeat the performance.

Smooth saw Duffy and Levine, two more of McNeary's men, pick up the trail of the next runner to be contacted at Ninth Avenue, and when he drew away from his fourth stop, he grinned when he caught a glimpse of Wade and Garison back on the job again.

"Feller—I'm beginnin' to like this racket," laughed Cohen as they swung across the Park and headed for Harlem. "We deliver a little snow and in return we collect heavy sugar—nice, eh? Can y'imagine how the Feds'd burn if they knew what suckers we were makin' of them?"

"Never mind the Feds!" snapped Smooth. "The less I hear about them the better I like it."

"Aw, don't get hot. Bet-a-Grand Rudd'll always be one jump ahead of those birds. Why—I'll bet we been deliverin' this junk smack under their noses. D' y' know, I wouldn't be surprised if there was Federal men walkin' right up and down those sidewalks out there." He pointed leisurely out the cab window at the throngs of pedestrians. "Yes, sir! Just walkin' up and down, and what good does it do 'em?"

"I wonder," grinned Smooth. "Sometimes, Yitz, I begin to think you might have a brain."

"Aw, I'm smart—plenty smart. You'll get to appreciate me when you know me better. How many more stops we got?"

"Only a few. This route is just about wrapped up now."

"Glad to hear it," said Cohen. "Speed—that's what I like. A nice snappy job, no lost motions, everything under control—and we swing into the home stretch way out front and breathin' easy. Yeah, a nice snappy job."

"Oh, it was a snappy job, all right," repeated Smooth. "And we're headin' for the long stretch now."

"*Home* stretch," corrected Cohen. "Ain't you ever been to the track?"

"Never had time. I'll take a week off and try it, soon."

IT was after ten when he dropped Cohen off at Rudd's apartment and headed for the garage. A bright moon and myriad stars were lighting the side streets with a dim reproduction of the glare of Times Square. He rolled past the many cafeterias where the night drivers stopped for their evening meals, but at none of these did he see Lucky Carmine. Ever since the showdown of the previous evening Smooth had kept a wary eye on the taxis that swept past him on the night streets. And he promised himself when this case was completed he would start a search

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for the little hackman that would put an end to this game of hide-and-seek.

It seemed that New York wasn't big enough for both of them now, and when Lucky learned Rudd's mob had folded up, he would certainly spot Smooth for a Federal. Before this happened, Smooth wanted to have a little talk with Lucky, and he wanted to be speaking over the sights of his own gun when it took place. He had decided to run the little hackman out of town—or at least give him one more opportunity to crawl out from under before he put on the pressure. If Lucky would not take the offer—some one was going to get hurt.

He swung the front wheels of his cab over the curb and started up the ramp, when he saw Old Squint waving to him from his usual position among the refuse barrels. Smooth stepped down on the brake, tossed a coin into the outstretched hand and grinned.

"'Lo, Squint. Kinda late for you to be around."

"Yeah, kinda late," agreed Squint. "Here—a little bloke gimme this fer you. I missed you goin' out."

He passed Smooth a note and lurched off in the darkness toward the smoke joint on the corner. Smooth unfolded the paper and spread it against the wheel.

I TOLD THERESA ABOUT LAST NIGHT. SHE THINKS YOU COULD HAVE PLUGGED ME AND DIDN'T WANT TO. SHE SAYS THANKS AND TAKE A NIGHT OFF.

Smooth crumpled the note, stuck it in his pocket and rolled into the garage. He drove to the wash stand, checked his meter readings, and walked toward the office. The first part of the note was easily understood, but Smooth wished Lucky had been a little more explicit with his warning. There was no doubt but that Theresa and Lucky were trying to give him a break. Their advice to him to take a night off evidently meant this evening, as Lucky had given Squint the note early in the day.

He thought for a moment, could figure no way in which Lucky could fit into the scheme of things tonight, and dismissed the note with a shrug. Harry Tone, the fleet owner, was still at his desk, and he looked up in annoyance when Smooth stepped into the office.

"Now what?" he barked. "You're the screwiest damn driver I've ever hired. Why so early?"

"Oh, just callin' it a night," said Smooth. "I'm givin' you two pounds for your end—and quitting."

"Whatsa matter? You gone nuts?"

"No, Harry—just movin' on. I may stop in to see you in a few days and tell you all about it. But I can't tonight. If any one asks for me, tell 'em I'm still rollin', will you?"

"Gimme the money and goodby," barked Tony. "You're a swell kid, Smooth, and I like you. But all this hocus-pocus is putting a curl in my hair. Last night you roll in with a folded up rig and eighty bucks. Tonight it's something else. So long, feller—write to me when they drop you in the clink. I'll send along some cigarettes."

SMOOTH grinned, tossed him the money and the trip card, and left the garage. He hailed a cab, drove to his hotel, and changed into fresh clothes. He glanced at his gun, saw the clip was full, and dropped it back into the holster. Something made him pause when he was about to leave the room — some fleeting idea that he had forgotten or neglected a duty. He glanced about, opened the top bureau drawer and, hardly conscious of the action, he dropped a few additional clips into his coat pocket. He shrugged, left the hotel, and taxied to the stage entrance of the Clinton Theater.

A few musicians of the pit orchestra were grouped about the alley, and as Smooth waited he found himself comparing this night with that other when he had rolled through the street on the front end of a hack, and had been hailed by a frightened girl standing in the shadows. It was hard

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to believe that had been less than two weeks ago. He had been detailed to his first big assignment—a new man in the district, out to make a name for himself. Now the Chief had put through a recommendation for his promotion. And better still, Dorothy was—

"Hello, darling. Keep you waiting long?"

He looked up and saw her standing beside the cab. She was smiling and beautiful, and Smooth climbed from the taxi and stood silently admiring her. He liked the way her hat tilted over one eye, and the silver fox collar of her coat made a frame for her face. He caught her hands, held them for a moment, and helped her into the cab.

"Sure you want to go through with it?" he asked.

"Of course I am—silly," she smiled, and leaned toward him. "Think I'm going to let Gilda have you?"

Smooth directed the driver to Rudd's apartment, turned up the front window and swung to face Dorothy.

"Would it make much difference?" he asked.

"Sometimes I think little boys only grow up on the outside—inside they're always *just* little boys with very little sense. Maybe these girls with a direct attack know more about men than we give them credit for. Maybe their way is the right way—let's see."

SHE slipped one arm around his shoulder, drew him to her and kissed him firmly on the lips. For a moment she held him and then kissed him again.

"*Now*," she said. "Does that give you any ideas—or courage?"

"When do we get married?" he blurted.

"*Mister* Kyle! This is *so* sudden!" she laughed. "Would next Saturday afternoon at about three o'clock be all right? I'll have the afternoon off now that the show is closing."

"Stop clowning, Dorothy," he said. "I'm—I'm on the level. Oh, I know I'm a washout as a Romeo—but—but—"

"So am I, Funny Face," she whispered. "I'm on the level with you—so much that it hurts. I love you, Smooth."

"That's swell. I was going good the other night on the Drive, and sort of hoping I'd work up enough nerve to propose. But this morning in the Chief's room, you acted as though I was two other guys. Naturally, I—well—"

"Did you expect me to bounce into your arms with McNeary as an audience? Say—he'd have tossed us both out, and I don't intend to start housekeeping on nothing a week. Be sensible, darling."

"That's a tough order with you around," he grinned. "But now that I'm practically the lord and master—how about you taking an order?"

"What sort of an order?"

"I'll drop you off at your place and tell Rudd you couldn't make the party. Tomorrow I'll square things with McNeary and—"

"Nothing doing!"

"Wow!" cried Smooth. "I start off with two strikes on me, eh? One word from me and you do as you please. And I thought brunettes were easy to manage. When do I get some obedience?"

"Whenever you ask the right questions," she laughed. "But this is business, dear. We've got to go through with it."

"Yeah—a hell of a business, if you ask me."

He paid off the driver and escorted Dorothy across the foyer and into an elevator. His teeth were clamped tightly and two little lumps of muscle twitched at the base of his jaws. The elevator boy smiled a greeting and Smooth growled at him, and when Simpson opened the door he growled again.

"Snap out of it, darling," whispered Dorothy, and pinched his arm. "Smile—it's a party."

"Nuts!" growled Smooth as he helped her out of her wrap.

Gilda was seated on the corner of Rudd's desk, holding a glass into which the gambler was pouring champagne. She waved

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a greeting to Dorothy, threw a kiss to Smooth, and pointed to other glasses on a silver tray near by.

"Bubbles for the ladies," she called. "Ruddy, old dear, is throwing a party as is a party. Warm up your tummies before he takes us out on the deep, dark ocean."

"Thanks, Gilda," said Smooth. "I was just saying to Dorothy it was a bit cold for a yacht party." He turned to Rudd. "Why not call it off tonight? We could bounce up to Silva's place and have more fun."

"Don't listen to him," protested Dorothy. "The moon is beautiful, and it's not a bit cold. I've never seen a more perfect night for a sail."

"Or a murder," added Smooth.

"What's the matter, Smooth?" asked Rudd. "Change your mind?"

"We won't let him," said Dorothy. "If he spoils our party we'll toss him overboard."

"I can swim," laughed Gilda. "Toss us both over—I'd enjoy the company."

"You're wet now, sweet," said Dorothy coldly to Gilda. "Why add to it?"

"I think Smooth's right," said Gilda. "It *is* cold tonight. I felt the chill when Dorothy came in."

RUDD was laughing heartily, and he seemed regretful to end the quarrel. But at length he rang for Simpson and the butler brought the girls' wraps. While they were putting them on, Rudd caught Smooth by the arm and drew him aside.

"We won't stay long," he said. "Yitz Cohen will drive us out to the landing. He's hired a car, and should be waiting for us at the door. I want you to have a look at the Roulette, because I might have to send you out to her sometime. You're going to be a big man in my organization, Smooth, and I've got some great plans for you. The sooner you learn all the angles the sooner we can branch out and take over the other large cities."

"Oh, I don't mind going out to the Roulette," said Smooth quietly. "I'd be glad to go alone. But I've never known it to fail, when two women stick their noses into things—blowie! Trouble!"

"Don't be a pessimist. We'll have a fine time, and we'll probably remember this as one of the first of many pleasant evenings."

"I'll remind you of that tomorrow," promised Smooth.

The girls were standing at the door, and Gilda waved impatiently as Simpson helped Rudd into his overcoat.

"Come on, slowpokes," she called.

They found Yitz Cohen seated behind the wheel of an expensive seven-passenger car, and the little gunman seemed quite proud of his duties as driver. When the doorman handed Rudd and his party into the car, Smooth waved him away with a flutter of hands and closed the door himself. Yitz crawled back into the driver's seat and sent the car swiftly across town and over the Queensboro Bridge.

"How far out do we go?" asked Smooth.

"I told Hoegy Bright to bring the Roulette down the Sound and anchor off Bayville. Chick Binder will pick us up at Sea Cliff with the Nicotine and run us out to her."

Smooth remembered that Bayville was one of the points McNeary had checked off on the map. Its number was six, and it was less than twenty miles by water from Northport. The Chief had come close in his guess as to where Rudd would place the Roulette—much closer than Smooth had figured. He had expected the boat to be at least fifty miles further along the Sound and was surprised at McNeary's accuracy.

"You brought her quite a way in," he said. "Any particular reason?"

"Why not?" laughed Rudd. "When you see the Roulette you'll realize the little lady is like Cæsar's wife—above suspicion. She's a dream of a boat, and if I have the time I think I'll cruise south in her next month."

The traffic thinned out when they swung into Northern Boulevard, and Cohen

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kicked the car along at a good rate. When they passed Little Neck, and left the city limits, he glanced into the mirror, saw there were no State Troopers behind them and jumped the speed again.

Smooth managed to glance from the rear window occasionally without attracting any attention, and as they skimmed along the open road he had a growing conviction they were being followed. A pair of headlights behind them lost their anonymity—they ceased to be one of a great many sets of twin beams and took on an individuality. A slight outward cast of the right lamp had distorted the focus, and Smooth was able to identify them from the many other lights that swung into line at their rear.

FOR a moment he thought of telling Rudd and suggesting they swing off into a side road to lose the trailer. But there was a possibility McNeary had changed his plans and sent a car along behind them to locate the contact point. He watched when they swung north at Roslyn and headed toward the waterfront at Sea Cliff.

Less than a half mile behind, the twin beams flared around the turn and straightened out to follow.

"By the way, Rudd," Smooth said quickly. "I hope you learned something last night. I mean about loud music."

He said it lightly, and tried to get his question across without giving the girls any idea of the seriousness of it. Rudd smiled and winked, and made a slight gesture toward Cohen.

"I'm way ahead of you, Smooth," he answered. "Yitz has decided to take violin lessons and he brought his fiddle along. It's in that leather case on the seat next to him."

"Yeah?" said Smooth. "I always wanted to play a fiddle. It's soothing to the nerves. Mind if I get in front and have a look at it?"

"Not at all. But is there any reason for your nerves to need soothing just now?"

"No-o-o—not particularly. But I'd feel better."

Rudd leaned forward and instructed Cohen to pull to the side of the road. When Smooth changed to the front seat, he saw that the following headlights had also stopped.

"Would you gentlemen mind talking English for a while?" said Gilda when the car rolled again. "Fiddle playing! Are we all going nuts around here?"

"Oh, no," said Rudd suavely. "Yitz Cohen expects to entertain us later this evening, and Smooth is probably one of those nosey individuals who has to see a thing to be convinced. Right, Smooth?" he added.

"Absolutely," agreed Smooth.

He bent forward, opened the case against the floor of the car and lifted out a Thompson sub-machine gun. He fitted the drum into place, set the muzzle against the floor and gripped the stock between his knees. Yes, Cohen had brought his fiddle, and it was ready to play a tune if Lucky Carmine happened to be in that car behind them.

"I think it's a Stradivusy," said Cohen. "You know—one of them expensive makes. If I stick to me practicin' I might grab off a job like Rubinoff or Ben Boiney. Y' never can tell."

"If you try to stroke that cat tonight," warned Gilda, "I'll bend it around your ear. Of all the lunatics I ever met—you and that patsy we met in San Diego take the marbles."

SMOOTH was aware that Dorothy had said nothing, and he was sure she understood Rudd's guarded conversation. When they reached a small landing at the water's edge in Sea Cliff he caught a worried look from her and smiled in assurance. Cohen climbed out from behind the wheel and helped the girls from the car. But Smooth made no move to get out. He turned and watched the back road and nodded when Gilda called to him.

"Go ahead—I'll be along in a moment,"

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he said, and turned to Rudd. "You folks go out to the end of the dock. I'll stick around—just in case."

"All right, Smooth," said Rudd. "Come along as soon as you're satisfied. The Nicotine is waiting for us." He pointed to the small runabout moored to the dock end.

"See her?"

Smooth nodded and waved him away. He waited until the party had seated themselves in the Nicotine, saw that the headlights had stopped at a bend of the road, and unlimbered the gun. He packed it in the case, grabbed the handle and sprinted down the dock.

The Nicotine was a trim little craft, about seventeen feet long and fitted with a double cockpit forward of the motors. Rudd and the girls were crowded into the rear seat and Chick Binder grinned at him from behind the wheel and motioned toward Cohen to make room for Smooth in the front seat. When he was comfortable, Chick idled the boat away from the dock and swung out into the Sound. She lifted smartly when he gave her a full throttle and Smooth judged they were skimming along at better than thirty-five miles per hour.

"Nice little number, ain't she?" asked Chick.

"A beauty," agreed Smooth, and turned to face Rudd. "This little honey wouldn't have been much good back in the old days. We needed plenty of boat to carry booze and a pair of engines that could drive weight."

"Them days is gone forever!" sang Rudd, and laughed. "It's a pushover, now, compared to the rum-running racket. We could carry all the stuff we need in a canoe. And I'd like to see any tub the Fed's could get to run this baby down. As a matter of fact," he grinned, "I'm afraid Chick might get a yen to become another Gar Wood and quit me. He's a sucker for these fast hoppers."

"They ain't so hot in a storm, Rudd," complained Chick. "A night like this is aces, but when it starts to blow, this baby tries to pound herself to pieces if I don't take it easy."

"Aw, stop bellyachin'," said Cohen. "Me—I go fer this Barnacle Bill stuff in a big way. Give 'er the gas, pal!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MACHINE GUN.

CHICK swung the wheel to catch a series of short waves that rolled toward them from a passing boat. The Nicotine banked sharply and flatted against the waves in a series of short, choppy jumps. Cohen yelped and grabbed Smooth by the arm as they banked again and straightened out on their run.

"Nix, pal!" he cried. "Don't take me serious—it was a gag, see?"

"What's that town over there to the right?" asked Dorothy, pointing to a few lights along the shore.

"Bayville's in there some place," said Chick. "Back a little from the beach. And that strip of land out there is Rocky Point. Those lights over to the left—just ahead of us—that's the Roulette."

"Nice sailin', sailor," said Cohen. "Now let's see you make a landing without sinkin' us."

Chick cut the motor and they glided in beneath the boom of the slim-lined yacht. Smooth judged her to be at least one hundred and twenty feet over all, and built for both speed and comfort. Bert Lovette waved to them from the deck and pointed to colored lanterns strung about the boat.

"All dressed up and waitin' for you," he shouted. "Come aboard and make yourselves at home."

"Now isn't that a hell of a way for a deck hand to greet the owner?" laughed Rudd. "You'll have to admit that this racket certainly makes for a community spirit amongst the boys." He pointed to the ladder leading over the side. "Up you go, ladies."

When the party had gone aboard, the Nicotine was moored to a boom extending outward from the starboard beam. Yitz

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Cohen took his "violin" from Smooth, glanced about the deck and winked.

"I understand all these scows is equipped with saloons," he said. "How's about a little drink?"

"G'wan, find it yourself," said Bright. He turned to Rudd and saluted smartly. "Ready for inspection, Admiral."

Rudd laughed, introduced the girls and they started forward.

"Hoegy used to be a cook in the Chinese navy," he said. "The sea's in his blood—makes him very nautical at times."

"Never mind that Chinese stuff," grinned Bright. "Durin' prohibition I was the pride of the off-shore fleet. I brought in more good booze in a week than all the bootleggers in town could cut and spoil in a month." He pointed to a small engine mounted well forward and covered with canvas. "Now that's the anchor engine. Everything's up to date and shipshape aboard this gondola. And behind you, them windows look out of the saloon, only it ain't the kind of saloon Cohen thinks it is."

"Aw, I knew there was a catch to it," grunted Cohen, and glanced through one of the ports. "It looks like a dining room to me."

"Right above it," continued Bright, taking no notice of Cohen, "is the pilot house where the skipper hangs out." He cupped a hand to his mouth. "Hey, Cap! Come down here!"

A tall, gaunt figure opened the door of the pilot house and stared down at them. His hair was gray and flew in untidy snarls about his face. Three inches of white cuff extended below the sleeves of his coat, giving to his arms the appearance of dangling, ape-like appendages. He was tall, but stooped, and a smouldering cigar was clamped in one corner of his mouth.

"Wadda you want?" he barked.

"Pleasant little feller, ain't he?" said Bright to the girls. "That tramp carries a master's ticket for any ocean, and when he's sober he's a crack sailor. But he's practically never sober. He used to work with me in the rum fleet — name's Cap Hartson." He waved his hand disgustedly toward the pilot house. "G'wan back in your coop."

HE showed them through the saloon and then went on a tour of inspection through the staterooms and galley. Dorothy insisted upon being shown the refrigerator and electric stove, and complimented Bright on his cleanliness. Gilda was bored and did not take the trouble to conceal it. And when Bright suggested a trip to the engine room to see his prized Diesels, she flatly refused.

"I came here for amusement, not a course in seamanship," she protested.

Rudd grinned and led them back into the saloon. He turned on the radio and a Jap mess boy opened champagne. The party got off to a flying start when Yitz Cohen decided to give an impersonation of Pat Rooney and landed on his ear in the middle of a double bell. Bert Lovette came in to say hello, and later Rudd introduced Smooth to Bill Oler, an additional member of the mob.

"This must have set you back aplenty," said Smooth when Rudd and he were alone. "You'll have to put out lots of junk to cover expenses."

"Oh, not so much," said Rudd. "The rich playboys had to get rid of their yachts when they became un-rich. These things are selling for a song now. And I know the song." He stood up and took Smooth by the arm. "Let the kids amuse themselves for a while. I want to show you something."

He led Smooth back through a narrow passage to a stateroom that had been equipped with the latest make of sending apparatus.

"Nice little radio outfit, eh?" he said. "That's the baby that brought us the bad news at Joe Silva's place the other night. Think you could learn to make it talk?"

"In about ten years. Who sends for you now?"

"Hoegy Bright. He's fast as hell, but he sends stuff that's hard to take sometimes. Understand?"

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Smooth knew Rudd was referring to the loss of the Cigarette, and he realized this suave gambler intended to get rid of Bright at the first opportunity. He nodded wisely, and seated himself at the key.

"Maybe Bright could show me the tricks," he suggested.

"Why not?" grinned Rudd. He stepped to the door and called Bright. When the gunman arrived, Rudd pointed to the set. "Smooth wants to see the wheels go round. Show him how it works. I'll go back and amuse the ladies."

Bright nodded and took Smooth's place at the key.

"First you gotta learn code," he explained. "It ain't hard, and you can practice with spoons on restaurant tables."

"Okay, pal," said Smooth. "Let's try the numbers for the first lesson. Let's see—six is my lucky number. How do you send six?"

"Aw, that ain't the idea," protested Bright. "You might just as well start at the beginning. Learn the alphabet in Morse and International and then work on through the rest."

"I know—I know," said Smooth. "But let's hear what six sounds like."

Bright rapped out the numeral and repeated it again and again until Smooth said he had enough.

"And that goes bouncing all over hell, eh?" asked Smooth. "Anyone this side of China can hear it?"

"Not much!" grunted Bright. "I'm workin' a dead key. You can't go splashin' code around—the government would raise hell."

SMOOTH nodded and figured his next move. The set was different from any he had seen, and it was going to take some clever questioning to learn its operation. Bright was wise and suspicious. He had no intention of teaching Smooth, and was merely stalling for time. Distrust was part of the racket, and he had not been fooled by Rudd's casual request.

"What makes the set talk?" asked Smooth.

"We'll get around to that later. How about a little drink?"

"Swell idea, Gorgeous," said Gilda from the doorway. She was holding a brimming glass of champagne in one hand and she extended it to Bright. "Take this and go look at the stars."

"Oh, I get it," laughed Bright. "You wanna have a talk with Smooth, eh?"

"Goodby, Hoegy. You're too smart for one little boy."

"Well—I'd like to give you a break," smiled Bright. "But you'll have to find another place to vamp the guy. This radio shack is outta bounds. It's one spot I don't allow visitors—see?"

Smooth would cheerfully have tossed Gilda through a port if he could. Whatever chance he had of getting off a signal to McNeary had gone glimmering when that blonde decided to go on the hunt. He tried to smile, but it didn't work, and when Hoegy ushered them both to the door, Smooth helped Gilda over the sill with enough force to send her sprawling against the opposite bulkhead.

"Darling! Have you gone cave-man on me?" she yelped.

"A love-pat," he grunted, and started back toward the saloon.

"Wait," she said, and grabbed his arm. "Come out on deck and let the moon soak some romance into your system. Please."

He took her arm and led her to the stern and leaned against the rail. The music of the radio drifted out to them and he heard Dorothy singing. At the end of the number there was a furious burst of applause from the men in the saloon, and Smooth wondered if she would miss all this attention when they settled down in a three-room flat.

"Does she always bounce that contralto at the ceiling?" asked Gilda coldly. "It must get monotonous after a time."

"That was a number from her show," said Smooth absently. "Boy—how she slays them with that."

"We were talking about the moon," said Gilda quickly. She rested her forearm on Smooth's shoulder and leaned

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against him. "I wonder what's become of it. The stars are gone too. But that's all right—maybe they're being considerate and want to leave us alone."

Smooth glanced up and saw a heavy bank of clouds had rolled in across Long Island and spread a mantle of darkness over the Sound. The shore lights were distant pinpoints of fire, and the water had become jet, like wet pavement in a dark alley. He was scarcely conscious of the fact that Gilda's arm had slipped around his shoulders and he stared off into the blackness, wondering just what sort of an idiot McNeary was calling him when the signal failed to come through.

THE faint throb of a motor came across the water, and in a moment it grew in volume. A speed boat, probably the same type as the Nicotine, was pounding along the shore line, and although Smooth could see no moving lights, when the whir of her motors increased he realized she was coming toward the Roulette. For a moment he wondered if it might be McNeary searching for him. It was late, and he had been unable to contact the Chief. Possibly this was a Federal boat.

"Why so silent?" asked Gilda.

"Huh?" grunted Smooth. "Oh—yeah, it's a swell night, isn't it?"

"What a lover!" she laughed. "Stop staring at nothing and tell me I'm beautiful."

"Yeah, you're beautiful," said Smooth, and the words were empty in his ears as he listened to the throb of the motors.

He remembered the Nicotine had been equipped with a powerful spotlight that had sent a dancing ray ahead of the boat as they drove out to the Roulette. He looked for a like beam, but found nothing but a wall of darkness that seemed to draw closer as the clouds piled heavier in the sky. He felt Gilda's hair against his cheek and suddenly the roar of the motor swung closer.

Was it McNeary? The Chief had promised not to start any fireworks until the girls were off the yacht. And Smooth found it difficult to mistrust his boss. But when the speed boat turned and circled the Roulette, and then came tearing under the stern, his doubts grew to an overpowering conviction.

He tried to force his sight through the darkness and spot that boat. But Gilda had twisted in front of him and was staring into his eyes. She kissed him and he grinned foolishly.

"Thanks, Gilda," he said. "But if it's all the same—"

Crimson flame leaped out into the night. A spitting line of fire drew a jagged line across the black water. The white beam of a spotlight flooded the stern of the Roulette and the *rat-tat-tat* of a sub-machine gun chattered again.

"Get down!" yelled Smooth.

He caught Gilda by the shoulders and threw her to the deck. She screamed, and instinctively started to get up. Smooth was beside her, one arm holding her down and the other pointing toward the passageway.

"Crawl in there—quick!" he snapped. "That burst was high—the next might be right."

The light from an opened door splashed a yellow triangle on the forward deck. It was marked with shadows as the group in the saloon poured out and ran to the rail.

"Get back—hurry!" yelled Smooth.

The words had hardly left his mouth when another burst of gunfire smashed out of the darkness. A man screamed—high and thin, and it ended in a curse. Smooth saw Hoegy Bright bow grotesquely as though he were curtsying to Death. He sprawled, and behind him Smooth saw Bill Oler, his hands tearing at a throat that was ringed with a scarlet necklace.

"Close that door!" cried Smooth. "Kill the light, you fools! Get down before you get burned down!"

THERE was no doubt in his mind now. That wasn't McNeary out there in the darkness. The Chief would never make a move of that sort.

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No, the man squeezing the trigger of that Tommy gun was probably a thin shouldered hackman who smiled a twisted grin as he sprayed those steel-jacketed slugs. It was Lucky Carmine—out to collect a debt.

Gilda had crawled over the sill and into a passage leading to the saloon. Smooth followed her, lifted from his knees and sprinted ahead. The lights were still burning and he glanced quickly about for Dorothy. She was close to the door, crouching against a bulkhead and peering out into the night.

Smooth caught her by the arm and dragged her into the passage. She looked at him and smiled faintly, and nodded when he gestured toward the deck.

"And stay down!" he ordered.

Rudd had switched off the lights and a silence hung over the Roulette. Smooth heard the throb of the speed boat's motor, and by the sound he judged it was turning in a wide circle.

"Gimme that chopper, Cohen!" he cried. "You wanted music, feller—you're gettin' it."

"Yeah—but who do we shoot at?" yelped Cohen. "I didn't think there was anybody mad at us."

"As long as Spanish has got a punk left on the street," said Rudd, "we're goin' to be targets. What's your guess, Smooth? Think it's the Spanish mob?"

"Of course it is," said Smooth. "I thought I saw a car tailing us from the city. Now I'm sure! That mug saw us leave Sea Cliff, doubled back somewhere and grabbed a speed boat. Now he's out there shooting us to pieces."

"Let's get outta here!" yelled Cohen. "Hey, Captain — Admiral—somebody get up the anchor and let's scram."

"Great idea," barked Rudd. "Hoegy and Olin are through, but there's enough men on this tub to take her down the Sound."

"Not a chance," said Smooth. "That boat can run circles around us."

"I know it," said Rudd. "But it's a gamble. If we can get out to open water there may be a wind. We'll get away."

The door opened and Captain Hartson walked slowly into the saloon. His gaunt figure was faintly outlined against the sky, and he stood, hands on his hips, peering into the room.

"Now what t' hell?" he growled. "What's all the shootin'?"

"Get the anchor up and let's run down the Sound," said Rudd. "Have you got anyone in the engine room?"

"Yeah—my first engineer is down there with a bottle. I'll go down and have a talk with him."

He stalked off through a passage, and Cohen cursed him eloquently. Smooth located the Thompson gun, fitted a drum into place and crept toward the door.

"What happens?" asked Cohen.

"C'mon up forward with me," said Smooth. "We might be able to get that hook out of the mud."

"And how!" yelled Cohen. He crept out onto the deck, and in his eagerness to get the Roulette under way, he sprinted toward the anchor engine. "Just watch Yitz the sailor," he shouted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LONE WOLF.

SMOOTH had not heard the speed boat's motor and he hoped Lucky might be having engine trouble. He flopped down, looked out over the water and cuddled the gun under his arm. As though Cohen's words had been a signal, the white beam of a spotlight flared over the bow. It lighted Cohen's figure and made of it a sharp silhouette.

"Down!" yelled Smooth.

He was an instant too late. The submachine gun stuttered and Cohen screamed. It was as though a giant hand had swept him across the deck and hurled him against the rail. He spun and dropped and Smooth swung his gun along the beam and squeezed.

The spurt of flame from the muzzle blinded him, and the spotlight winked out,

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leaving the water a black void. The motor of the speed boat throbbed steadily, turning in a wide circle that brought it off the port beam. Smooth ran across the deck and followed the sound with the gun. It was useless to shoot into a wall of darkness, and it looked as though he would need all the slugs left in that drum. He hurried back to the saloon and found Dorothy and Gilda seated on the deck with Rudd.

"Where's Chick and Bert?" he demanded. "I could use a little help around here."

"They'll be back," said Rudd. "We got a nice outfit stowed away in one of the staterooms. Take it easy."

There was a sound of footsteps along the passage, and Smooth saw two dark figures crawling toward the saloon. He heard the clink of metal, and suddenly a match flared. Chick was jamming drums into place in two sub-machine guns and hurrying to complete the job before the match burned out.

"Now that's something," said Smooth. "I'll take the stern, you get up to the bow, Chick. Bert can bounce around here and cover whatever side that mug out there decides to come in on."

"Yeah—but don't get careless," warned Binder. "See what he done the last time? He cuts his motor and drifts in close, and when he gets something to shoot at—wham!"

"All right—don't give him anything to shoot at," said Smooth. "Come on—let's get goin'."

He crawled aft, keeping close to the deck house and taking advantage of the deeper shadows cast by a canvas awning stretched above the after deck. He listened but could hear nothing above the gentle slap of the waves against the sides. He slipped the muzzle of the gun forward, drew a coin from his pocket and threw it against the deck house bulkhead a few feet away.

As the silver tinkled the spotlight flared again. It swung quickly along the deck and caught Chick Binder flatfooted in the bow. The motor roared into life and with it came the chatter of the gun. Smooth emptied a drum at the moving light and saw it wink out.

He listened, waiting for his ears to pick up the sound of the motor. The staccato crack of his gun had deafened him for the instant, and when he was again able to distinguish other sounds he heard the motor roaring off into the night. There was another sound, too. One that was closer and even less pleasant. Chick Binder was crying—low, broken sounds that sounded like a child in pain.

SMOOTH crawled forward and found him huddled against the anchor engine. He looked once and turned away. Chick wasn't playing in this game any more. He was finished.

A figure beckoned to Smooth from the saloon door and he crawled toward it. Lovette was crouched on the deck, his gun tight under his arm and a worried frown on his face.

"Think you hit 'em?" he asked.

"I might have put a crease in the boat," said Smooth. "It's like peggin' at a firefly. That baby must be doin' better than thirty an hour, and every time the gunner lets go a burst, the guy at the wheel swings. The odds are against us—plenty!"

"What t' hell happened to that rumpot skipper?" asked Lovette.

"How do I know? Why don't you go and dig 'im up? If we don't get outta here quick *we ain't goin'!*"

Lovette nodded and crawled to the ladder leading down to the engine room. Smooth heard him curse and saw a flare of light come from the doorway when Lovette snapped on the switch. He lifted his gun and waited for the burst that he thought would follow that light. But it did not come, and Smooth wondered if his shots had been better than he imagined. A moment later there was a muffled crash of a sub-machine gun. Smooth looked quickly over each beam but saw nothing. Then he realized the shots had come from below.

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Lovette joined him and the gunman's face was hard. He nodded toward the engine room and laughed at Rudd.

"Nice crew you got, boss," he growled. "They needed a little rum to steam up their nerve and didn't know when to quit drinkin'. They were stiff — blind drunk and shiverin' on the deck."

"And you—" said Rudd quietly.

"I sung 'em a lullaby—the lice!"

"Not so good, Bert," snapped Rudd. "How do we move this barge if the coppers decide to come out and investigate?"

"Aw, them bums down there wouldn't 'a' been any good for two days. If we could get in to Sea Cliff I know where to dig up a guy to sail this boat."

"Yeah—if!" said Rudd. "With that gunner buzzin' around in the dark, our chances are lousy."

"Hey—that's not a bad idea," said Smooth quickly. "Rudd—why don't you let Bert take you and the girls ashore? You can outrun that other boat and I'll stand 'em off till Bert brings out a few guys to help me."

"Horatius at the bridge, eh?" grinned Rudd. "That's a nervy play, kid. We might put it across at that. But how do we get away in the boat without collecting a dose of lead poisoning?"

"And why don't you come, too?" asked Dorothy suddenly.

"Oh, hello, baby," grinned Smooth. "Thought you and Gilda were asleep."

"Sleep hell!" said Gilda. "We're just keeping out of this rose carnival and letting you smart boys find the answer. The sooner I see the last of this tub the better I'll like yachting."

"We could all get away together," insisted Dorothy. "There's no reason for you to stay, Smooth."

"Me—I like it here," said Smooth. "And when you gals hear another speed boat slamming past the old Roulette, you'll be glad Uncle Smooth is sitting pretty with a chopper to cover your back. No, I'll hang around a while."

"It's your party," said Rudd. "If you want to slip us an easy out, it suits me."

"Good! Now hold everything while I see if we have visitors."

HE crept out onto the forward deck and made his way ahead until he found what was left of Chick. He took the gun from the limp hands and stretched out behind the anchor engine. The night was quiet and the clouds were low flung and even darker than previously. He searched over the narrow limits of surface visibility but could see nothing. Again he tried to attract attention by a flung coin. Nothing happened and he got to his knees.

A spotlight flared in the darkness and Smooth dropped. He flattened himself against the deck and pressed his face to the boards. A long, even burst came through the darkness, and Smooth forgot to breathe. There was another splash of fire from the speed boat and Smooth knew the gunner was painting narrow strips along the deckhouse bulkhead with a brushful of lead.

Suddenly the light died. The boat roared off in a wide circle and Smooth sprinted to the saloon.

"Come on! Get goin'!" he said quietly. "Scram into the Nicotine and head for the beach before that bird completes his circle."

Bert leaped down the ladder and swung the Nicotine in from her mooring at the boom. He turned and helped the girls into the rear seat as Rudd shook hands with Smooth.

"Goodby, sucker," said Rudd. "If you pull this job, I'll cut you in even on the take."

"That's swell," said Smooth. "Tell me more about it later." He turned to Dorothy. "G'by, Sweet—keep your feet dry."

"Smooth! Please—"

Lovette started the motor and the Nicotine lifted on her step. Smooth caught a glimpse of Dorothy's face turned toward him and he grinned. Then the speed boat roared off into the night. He heard another motor throbbing in the darkness and flattened against the deck. A beam washed

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the side of the Roulette, held for an instant on the empty boom, and was suddenly snapped off.

"Smart people," grunted Smooth.

If Lucky Carmine was shoving that boat around he certainly knew what he was doing. The odds had been reversed, and even though Rudd knew little about a sub-machine gun, his chances of making a hit were about the same as Lucky's. It would be anybody's fight out there in the darkness, and if Lucky played around with that spotlight, he was just asking for trouble.

Smooth hurried to the radio room and switched on a small desk light. His fingers had been aching to get at the key ever since the fight had started. But had he made a play of this kind with Rudd aboard, instant suspicion would have turned a gun at his chest. He studied the set and had about decided upon its operation when he heard the roar of a speed boat.

"Now what!" he grunted, and switched off the light.

The boat was circling the Roulette, each loop brought her nearer, and at length the motor was cut. Smooth went silently on deck and hoisted himself up onto the canvas awning. It bulged slightly beneath his weight and he realized that a good thick piece of steel would offer a better protection to sub-machine gun bullets, but this at least gave him a vantage point of height. And, he decided, no one would be apt to look on top of an awning.

A spotlight swept along the deck below him. It started at the bow and moved slowly along to the stern.

"You're a prize chump!" said a woman sharply.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAST LAUGH.

SMOOTH started at the voice that came out of the night. Remembrance came to him instantly. It was Theresa—Lucky's dark-haired girl friend from the Trocado Club. He eased off the trigger, not from any timidity or squeamishness about sending a burst at a woman. Far from it. That little lady had helped to burn down half of Rudd's crew, and he could hardly consider her a shrinking violet. But curiosity and a belated realization that he was an agent in the Bureau of Narcotics held his fire. McNeary wanted a *few* prisoners to show for his night's work, and at the rate things were going, Smooth wondered just where those prisoners were coming from.

"Aw, they're all gone!" Lucky's voice was low and filled with disgust. "They couldn't take it."

Smooth was glad Theresa was not speaking to him when she had called some one a prize chump. For an instant he had an idea she was talking over a gun sight that was pointing in the general direction of his chest. Now he realized her words were for Lucky. He drew his first breath in sixty seconds.

"That guy Smooth wouldn't run out," insisted Theresa. "He's a wise egg. Plenty smart!" Smooth nodded and thanked her silently. "I spotted him for a wisey the minute I saw him at the club," she added, "and if you'd listened to me he'd never have reached the coast to ruin things for us. I told you to knock him off."

Smooth withdrew his thanks and listened with growing interest.

"Yeah—you knew!" said Lucky. "I been after that mug for days, and could 'a' had him cold at the garage this mornin', only you said to lay off."

"Sure I did. He had you *right,* in the restaurant last night. That guy would never have let you get a gun clear—he just went soft on you. But what's that got to do with this set-up?"

"Nothin', only you keep jabberin' about him. I tell you he ain't on the boat. If he was, he'd been peggin' at us already."

Smooth rested the tip of his chin on the awning pole and looked down at the water. The light was off, but he made

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out the dim outlines of the speed boat as it drifted toward the Roulette. Soon he saw Theresa was at the wheel, and next to her Lucky Carmine stood, with a submachine gun pointed at the deck house.

"I'm goin' aboard," said Lucky. "There must be a load of junk on that scow. And it's goin' to be a pleasure to grab it and send her to the bottom when we get done unloadin'. You know—a present from Lucky Carmine to Bet-a-Grand Rudd, with love and kisses. I hope t' hell I loaded that louse plenty with one of those bursts."

"All right, stupid," snapped Theresa. "Make up your mind. If you're going to be a fool, hurry up and get it over with. Those birds will be back with the army and navy in about ten minutes. Let's get doin' something!"

THE boat was rubbing alongside the Roulette, and Theresa had grasped the mooring line. She held it while Lucky started up the ladder, the gun under his arm and a grin of anticipation on his face.

"Comin' aboard?" he asked.

"Maybe I better," she said. "Keep your eyes on the deck, and if anything moves, don't ask questions—smear it!"

She climbed up beside Lucky, and they stood silently for a moment viewing the deserted decks. Smooth twisted the muzzle of his gun on a line with Lucky's chest and tightened his finger slightly on the trigger.

"Put it down!" he barked. "Down, Lucky—drop the gun or I'll spread you like a fried egg!"

Lucky started and the gun lifted automatically. But Theresa was quicker and grabbed the barrel. Lucky nodded his head silently and let go his grip on the stock. The gun clattered to the deck.

"You rat!" he grinned, and looked up at Smooth.

"That's only one of his names," said Theresa. "And now—is he smart?"

"Thanks, pals," said Smooth. "If you kids will sprawl face down on the deck, I'll climb from my perch and have a drink with you. Face down, please," he repeated. "I trust you—but let us be sensible. And Lucky—kick that chopper out of reach before you take the nap."

Carmine moved the gun along the deck with his foot and stretched out on the deck beside Theresa. It took Smooth five minutes to maneuver his way down from the awning without getting out of position for a quick burst if Lucky should happen to change his mind and try for the gun. At length he was standing above them, and he leaned down and lifted a small caliber automatic from Lucky's shoulder holster. He looked at Theresa and could think of nowhere a gun could be hidden, but remembering Gilda had once surprised him with a sleight-of-hand trick in Mexico, he decided to make sure.

"Strictly business," he said as he searched and winked at the name Theresa muttered in his ear. There was no gun, and he backed away a few feet. "Stand up, folks, and let's talk it over."

Lucky helped Theresa to her feet and Smooth was glad the little hackman could take it with a grin. He had seen so many would-be gunmen go sour when they looked into the wrong end of a gun that he had begun to think there was no nerve in any. He saw that Theresa was deathly pale, but she, too, tried for a grin and her hands did not tremble when she asked for and received a cigarette from Lucky.

SMOOTH caught with one hand the butt that Lucky tossed him and flipped it into his mouth. He fumbled for a match, but lifted the gun muzzle a trifle when Lucky stepped forward to offer him a light.

"No thanks," he said. "I'll manage. And now how about exchanging secrets, eh? I'm a Fed—got a swell job with the government. What's your racket?"

"*I knew it!*" snapped Theresa. "I wasn't sure until you held back on that trigger when you spotted us. But then I figured you right. One of the Narcotic boys, eh?"

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"That's right," said Smooth. "And maybe we can still make a deal. This little party you staged tonight could mean the toaster* for both of you. I'm not promising, but I might be able to throw you a pass** if you talk. The Chief's anxious to know who's supplying the brains for Spanish. If you know, and talk pretty, maybe we could strike a bargain with McNeary. You'd be doin' it all***—but what t' hell, that's the breaks."

"Thanks for nothing," laughed Lucky. "I was on the level when I told you my lungs were shot to pieces. I'd last about a month in stir. No—a deal won't help me, Smooth. I play it all or none. But that stuff about the farm wasn't hokum. Theresa has a spot all picked out, and if you say you'll try to get her a light one, I'll play ball."

"Shut up!" cried Theresa. "Don't you know better than to make a deal with a Fed?"

"Aw, Smooth's a pal of mine," laughed Lucky. "He wouldn't cross me." He turned to Smooth. "Listen, chump—I'm the Spanish outfit—see? All the time you been learnin' to be a good boy, I been takin' over the Big Town. Big Spanish is just a punk for me. I been supplyin' the headwork for the organization and takin' the profits. Theresa and me decided the hack would be a grand front. What t' hell—who'd go lookin' for a big shot on a cab seat? It gave me a legitimate front and she stacked away the marbles in a safe deposit box while I clowned around on a taxi. Nice, eh?"

Smooth whistled and shook his head. And again he was glad his finger had not tightened on that trigger. Here was a break that would wrap up the case for McNeary and draw at least three lines of praise from the Treasury Department in a formal letter of recognition.

"So we were both usin' the old hack racket for a front," he said. "And all the time I was chasing around town after the brains of the Spanish mob, he was looking at me over a cup of coffee. Well, I'm the champion idiot of the world!"

"Yeah, but a lucky one," said Theresa. "The boy friend is carrying the wrong tag. It ought to be Unlucky Carmine. So now that's over—where do we go?"

"You and Lucky have been wantin' to take me for a ride," grinned Smooth. "Here's your chance. McNeary's waiting for me at Northport, and he must think I've gone on a vacation. Rudd left to collect some boys to fill up the gaps you shot in his outfit and he'll be back soon. So I guess Theresa will have to drive us into Northport and I'll ask the Chief to arrange a welcoming committee for Rudd's mob."

"It'll be a pleasure," said Theresa. "I'm tryin' to hate you, Smooth—but I can't. You're a swell kid, even if you are on the wrong side of the fence. But as for Rudd! Bring on the Feds, Honey—and bring plenty."

LUCKY helped her into the speed boat, and seated himself beside her. Smooth watched them from the deck and was careful not to let his gun swing away from them when he eased over the side and dropped into the back seat.

"What 'd you name this runabout?" he asked when Theresa swung the wheel and headed for Northport.

"Late Money," grinned Lucky. "I picked her up at a bargain this morning. After I tailed you chumps down to Sheepshead Bay in the rain, I figured Rudd was bringin' in his junk with boats. So I hadda compete."

"You did a swell job," grunted Smooth.

He noticed Theresa was using but one hand on the wheel and had the other about Lucky's shoulders. She pulled the little hackman toward her and turned to kiss him.

"Hey!" shouted Smooth. "Save that till later. I know you love that egg, but keep both hands on the wheel."

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* Toaster—electric chair.

** Pass—commutation of sentence to life.

*** Doin' it all—life sentence.

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"You don't know the half of it, dearie," said Theresa. "I love this guy so much I can't even think about him goin' anywhere alone. Why—he'd even be lonesome in hell without me. Poor Lucky—he tried so damn hard to make a million for me, and he came so damn close." She shook Lucky's chin and kissed him again. "I won't leave you, honey—ever!"

The spotlight swung in a graceful arc as they turned in toward the lights of Northport. It flickered across a tide marker that leaned sharply with the current. The boat straightened out, whirled forward through a smother of spray and drove straight at the bobbing pole.

"Look out!" cried Smooth. "Theresa! Look out for that pole! You'll crash!"

"I expect to, Smooth," she said.

Smooth leaned forward to grasp the wheel, but Lucky knocked aside his arms. The next instant the Late Money jammed her bow against the pole. There was a sound of tearing wood, a scream of metal as the motors tore loose, and Smooth hurtled through the blackness. He smashed against the water and felt the gun leave his hands. For a second he was stunned, his mind a whirl of clashing thoughts. He fought his way to the surface and saw a few bits of wreckage twisting in a smother of white water. He swam toward them, the weight of his coat and trousers slowing his movements.

"Lucky!" he called. "Lucky—Theresa—where the hell—"

"That's the spot—hell," said Theresa.

He turned and saw her with both arms around Lucky's neck. A jagged cut had marred the whiteness of her cheek, and Lucky's eyes were closed. She seemed to be supporting him and keeping her mouth above the surface with difficulty. When Smooth started toward them she smiled and shook her head.

"S'long, Smooth," she gasped. "Hope you make it to the beach—not far. Lucky and I are goin' places. We couldn't stick it out alone because—"

The black water closed over their heads and Smooth cried out in horror. His clothes hampered his movements, and the bitter cold waters of the Sound cut into him like a knife. He tried one foolish dive, nearly strangled when the coat wrapped about his head, and then came gasping to the surface. A kapok cushion bobbed slowly past, and he reached for it. His hands were numb, and the fingers had no substance. He jammed the cushion beneath his chest, lifted his head and yelled.

A MOTOR throbbed near the shore line and came pounding toward him. He yelled again and waved an arm. The effort twisted him from the cushion and he sank below the surface. His ears were filled with a steady roar when he splashed up into the night and the white shaft of a spotlight blinded him.

The motor stopped, and hands reached down from the boat and pulled him from the water. A violent chill shook him and he looked stupidly about at his rescuers. McNeary was supporting him by one arm, and on the other side Ted Wade grinned and thumped him on the back.

"Quit it," he gasped. "Look around—quick. Lucky and Theresa were with me."

"Sorry, Smooth," said McNeary. "You're all alone—just you and a cushion."

"Somehow I'm not sorry," said Smooth quietly. "What a swell kid she was—what a sticker!"

McNeary helped him out of his wet clothes, and Ted Wade rubbed him vigorously, alternating the rubs with hearty thumps on his chest and back. Smooth briefly outlined the events of the night through teeth that chattered and shook. The boat was speeding toward a landing and they hustled him into dry clothes donated by Wade and the men who comprised the crew of the speed boat.

"We'd just about given up hope of any word from you," said McNeary. "Ted Wade got impatient and we walked down to the dock, otherwise we'd never have heard that crash. Thought I'd lost an agent when I did hear it."

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"It was close enough," said Smooth. "How about the Roulette—will you send a few men out to take her?"

"Yes. Garrison and Duffy are here. They'll go out with Wade and form a reception committee for Rudd's mob. I'll go to the city and drop in to see Rudd at his apartment. It's a job I've been anxious to do for a long time."

"Yeah?" grinned Smooth. "But what about me?"

"You?" repeated Rudd in amusement. "Oh, you can call it a night. I'll drop you off at the hotel and you can crawl under the blankets."

"Like hell! Gimme a break, Chief—I wanna take that guy. Besides—Dorothy is probably at his place, and if Rudd saw you there might be shooting. Why not wrap it up nicely?"

"How do you figure that?"

"Rudd won't be surprised to see me. In fact, he'll be expecting me. I can take him before he knows what it's all about. Be a regular—let me have one little laugh before the party breaks. So far I've been on the receiving end all the way through."

The boat had run alongside the dock and McNeary and Wade stood grinning at the picture Smooth presented. The trousers were too long, and he had rolled them into bulky cuffs at the bottoms. Wade's coat was tight across his shoulders and Smooth had been unable to button the shirt. One of the crew had donated a pair of canvas topped shoes that flapped along the boardwalk like paddles. His hair was plastered over his eyes and he was shivering, and his lips were blue. Still he persisted.

"How about it—do I take Rudd?" he demanded.

"All right, hungry," laughed McNeary. "Get in that car and try to get warm. I'll let you play it through—but if you muff this deal I'll wring your neck."

SMOOTH grinned and thumbed his nose at Ted Wade. He climbed into a sedan parked near the waterfront and waved to the other Federal men who were laughing at him from a distance. McNeary got behind the wheel, and after a few hurried instructions to Wade, he started toward New York.

Smooth curled into knot on the back seat, rubbed his ears and blew on his hands. The car rushed along the night roads, ignoring the traffic lights and taking each turn in a screaming slide. They raced over the Queensboro Bridge and McNeary drew to a stop a half block from Rudd's apartment.

"Here you are, son," he said, and handed Smooth an automatic. "You may need it, and that gun of yours might not behave after the ducking. Now go up and take Rudd!"

"Yes, *sir!*" said Smooth, and paddled along the street.

The doorman was off duty, but the elevator boy's eyes opened wide in astonishment at Smooth's appearance. He said nothing, but stopped at Rudd's floor and Smooth heard him laughing as the door closed.

Simpson, the butler, had evidently gone, and it was Dorothy who answered when Smooth rang the bell. She stared at him silently for an instant, and then her arms were around him and she was crying.

"I was frightened," she whispered. "So frightened. We've been waiting and waiting—and when we didn't hear from you—I—"

"Take it easy, sweet," said Smooth. "Here—what's the idea of the tears?" He dabbed at her eyes with his fingers and drew her to him. "Everything's all right now. Stop crying—I'm not hurt. It's the same Smooth under this cockeyed outfit." He held his lips close to her ear and spoke quietly. "Stay out of the way when I take him—get it?"

She nodded and he felt a nervous tremor run through her body. A moment later her head went up and she smiled—a forced, twisted smile that called for another kiss. Smooth shook her chin lightly, and suddenly grew cold. Theresa had done that to Lucky Carmine—just before they died.

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"Where t' hell did you get those clothes?" laughed Rudd from the doorway.

He slipped an arm through one of Smooth's and led him into the library. Gilda was seated on the corner of the desk and beside her was the leather case in which Rudd kept his diamonds. She looked up from the stones and grinned when she saw Smooth.

"Don't tell me," she laughed. "I'll guess in a minute—now let's see—you're going to a masquerade—that it?"

"Never mind the smart cracks," said Smooth, and reached for the decanter. "I'll explain them away when I have a drink."

HE poured himself a generous drink, lifted it to his lips and downed it when Rudd seated himself behind the desk. Dorothy was standing near the door, her hands rigid at her sides and her eyes steady upon Smooth. He moved back a step, set down the glass and grinned at Rudd.

"It's a long story," he said. "But that was Lucky Carmine behind the chopper. He's dead now. That winds up the Spanish outfit, because Lucky was the brains."

"Well, I'll be damned!" snapped Rudd.

"Maybe," said Smooth. "And now that you're the Big Shot in the dope racket—my boss wants to have a little talk with you."

"Your *boss?*" said Rudd, and his eyebrows lifted in surprise. "I don't get you, Smooth. "Who's your boss?"

"A guy by the name of McNeary," said Smooth. His gun was in his hand and it was steady on Rudd's chest. "He's the District Supervisor of the Bureau of Narcotics. Ever hear of him?"

Silence was heavy in the room. It seemed a live thing that beat against the walls. Rudd was leaning forward, his hands flat on the desk top, and his eyes were glinting like little black beads. Beside him, Gilda was rigid. One hand was resting on the stones and the other had lifted to point at Smooth.

"A copper!" she cried. "Smooth Kyle—a *copper!*"

And then she laughed.

"Steady, beautiful!" snapped Smooth. "Get off that desk and lift your hands a bit. That's the girl. Now, Rudd—be a good boy and take it like a gambler."

"You fool!" said Rudd quietly. "I would've made you rich—a millionaire! Shove that gun back under your arm and listen to reason—you dumb bunny. What can the government offer you that I can't double? *Double?* Hell—I'll raise the ante a million. Act smart—hackman! I took you off a hack—a midnight taxi that crept up alleys looking for nickels and dimes. I gave you a crack at big money. And now, you fool, you want to kick it all to hell."

"Yeah—so they tell me," said Smooth. He motioned to Dorothy with his left hand. "You'll find a rod on Gilda's chest—take it."

Dorothy walked around behind Smooth, crossed to Gilda and took a small automatic from her. Gilda stared at Dorothy in disgust and her lip lifted in a sneer.

"Hell—another copper!" she said. "The place is cluttered up with Feds tonight."

"Save it," said Smooth. He looked at her and grinned. "I know how you feel, but—"

"*Look out, Smooth!*" cried Gilda suddenly. "Rudd's a gambler—he'll—"

Rudd's hand had dropped into the open desk drawer. It came out with a gun that flipped up over the desk top and leveled at Smooth's chest.

"Sucker!" said Smooth, and tightened his grip on the automatic.

THREE slugs caught Rudd in the stomach. The gambler's head pounded against the desk top. His body slid in a loose heap behind the desk.

"Thanks, beautiful," said Smooth to Gilda. "I never figured he'd try a long shot like that. Hell—the odds were a thousand to one against him. Bet-a-Grand Rudd, eh? They named him right."

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"Not a bad guy when you got to know him," said Gilda.

"Yeah—but why do I get a break from you? I thought I was poison."

"You're a hard guy to stop liking," she said quietly, and turned to Dorothy. "And you're a little slow, honey. You better learn to take better care of your man if you expect to keep him. All men are stupid—and the nicer they are the dumber they act."

"So I've noticed," said Dorothy.

"Remember it," said Gilda. She ran a finger through the diamonds spread upon the Queen Anne desk. "And to think I had just earned another of the pretty things. Oh, well—"

"They're all yours, beautiful," said Smooth. "Pick 'em up. And I hear that southern France is a swell place to spend the winter. There's swimming and gambling, and—well, there's even a title floating around if a gal is smart enough to marry the right guy. How's about it—wanna go?"

Gilda turned and scooped the stones into her purse. She snapped it closed, crossed to Smooth and kissed him lightly on the lips. She walked to the door, turned and stared at Dorothy.

"You're getting a grand guy, damn you!" she said. "Lord, how I envy you!" She smiled at Smooth. "Spend your honeymoon in Cannes—I promise to make it interesting."

When she had gone, Dorothy looked at Smooth and her eyes were soft and very wise. She smiled when he put an arm around her and asked for understanding.

"Don't let's tell McNeary," he said. "He might not agree."

"I won't tell him—anything," she answered.

Nor did she remind Smooth that he had fired only two shots at Bet-a-Grand Rudd. The first had come from her gun—the one she had taken from Gilda. And her shot had been inches nearer to the gambler's heart.

She kissed him and waved a warning hand to McNeary, who stood smiling at them from the doorway. The Chief clasped his hands above his head and shook them. He might have been human, too.

THE END

The World's Richest Man

IT is often a matter of conjecture just what individual can be named as the world's richest man and the person usually nominated for the honor is one of three famous American multi-millionaires, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew J. Mellon or Henry Ford.

However, upon studying world statistics, none of these three is eligible for the title, which according to English figures, rightfully belongs to the Hindu potentate, Sir Osman Ali Khan, Nizam of Hyderabad, India. This ruler, who has the power of life and death over his 15,000,000 subjects, has a fortune of more than five hundred million dollars in gold alone, aside from his great store of silver and precious stones, accumulated through the centuries by the Mogul emperors. In fact, he is so wealthy that it is claimed he has no definite idea of the exact extent of his fortune.

His gifts at the marriage of his two sons recently in Nice, France, showed clearly the great wealth of the Nizam. He gave to his prospective daughters-in-law, who are the daughter and niece of the Caliph of Istanbul, presents in jewels and cash of $1,200,000, besides bestowing a princely income on the venerable Caliph himself. —*Gerald FitzGerald.*

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The Fighter That Kills

By H. H. MATTESON

She watched a fight to the death

Kadeena the killer knew no scruples, and nothing could stop him—then the mad Aleutian gods cast a strange spell

A DARK young fellow climbs up the ladder of the cannery dock. He stands looking around anxious. I and Go Bang Gibbons, staring through the window, we seen it was Moxt Pil Loring, a terrible square young Aleut half-breed. We go out. Moxt stands pointing dramatic, one hand out over Bering Sea, the other west to where a long plume of dirty gray smoke lay along the sky.

"Hain't the Coast Guard ship in?" he asks distressed.

"No," says Go Bang. "It hauled out last night for duty. It's likely three hundred mile from here by now. Why?"

Moxt Pil drops one hand, but keeps pointing to that streak of smoke. "Kiska Mountain busts loose again last night," he says. "They was a terrible shake this morning before daybreak. The whole cliff on the north end tore loose, fell, filled the channel. The fish trap location of Unger Kee, the Aleut Klootchman, beyond, that was worth forty thousand dollars a year, hain't worth a cent now. The swimming fish has had to change their course. Now

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the trap, worthless formerly, of Sitchum Doreen, that young white woman, is busting full of big Kings. Sitchum is rich, if—if she lives to enjoy it."

"I'm just terrible glad Sitchum has had good luck at last," says Go Bang emphatic. "How does that beach rat, her former husband, Kadeena Doreen, feel now? I'm plumb tickled. That sculpin of a Kadeena, to desert a fine girl like Sitchum, account of she was poor, to go live with a Klootchman account of she was rich. I been wishing a long time this Kadeena would do something so I could arrest him and sling him in for life."

"This may be your chance," says Moxt Pil serious. "Kadeena, crazy wild because his Klootchman's trap now hain't worth a dime, is making the Aleuts think Sitchum worked some black magic to fetch on the volcano. Them natives have gone plumb *piblokto*.

"They're hunting Sitchum everywhere. If they find her they'll torture and kill her and they hain't a doubt."

"*Piblokto*" means when a Aleut, in some superstitious crazy spell, goes murderous mad.

"I wish the Coast Guard was in," says Moxt Pil. "It'll take a whole squad of men to subdue them *piblokto* savages. It may be too late by now. If they've found Sitchum, it is too late. She's dead."

"You say them Aleuts figure Sitchum worked magic, to fetch this volcano and to fill the channel and to ruin Unger Kee's trap, to fill her own with fish?"

"Kadeena suggested it first. He pointed out to the Aleuts that plenty times, in the edge of night, his former wife had been seen on the cliff top, kind of prowling around, waving her arms. Oh, they believe it now. When I left, while the hot sulphur ashes was falling all around 'em, the natives was dancing frenzied, beating the *tintin* drum. If they can discover Sitchum's hiding place she will die immediately, to appease the mad Aleutian gods. I wish the Guard was here. It may be too late by now."

"It hain't no ways required we need a squad of men to subdue them crazy savages down," says Go Bang.

He turns to me. "Kapsu," he says, "get our power boat ready fast as you can. We're going."

I hurries to oil and gas our boat. As I work hurried I recalls distinct the first time I ever seen this Sitchum girl, and similar, Kadeena Doreen. We was having a carnival at the Thunderbird, skin boat races, swimming, diving and so forth. Sitchum, which they call her such account of she's the best swimmer and diver in the North. Her and Kadeena, who swims good, too, was the stars. There they got acquainted. Sitchum had twenty thousand dollars left by her father, an old whaler. Kadeena married her, took her twenty thousand, drove a trap that never took a fish. Unger Kee's trap, in the other split of the channel, was getting 'em all, forty thousand dollars' worth profit a year.

Showing the rat he is, this Kadeena deserts Sitchum, goes and lives with Unger Kee. Sitchum went hungry. But mostly the shame of getting deserted for a native liked to of killed her. Now, all them fish going to Sitchum's trap, I seen easy how a bilge rat like Kadeena would go plumb crazy mad and seek ways to get even.

I fetches the power boat around. After Go Bang and Moxt Pil are in we take his skin boat in tow and away we go.

"Go Bang," says Moxt Pil, "I should warn you on this Kadeena. It wasn't just joking the natives named him Kadeena Memamloose Doreen. Them words mean, 'a fighter that kills.' That whaler, Hawkins, found dead on Devil's Bend—Kadeena murdered him. Kadeena killed that Russian woman on Squad Duck. He's a killing brute, fears no one, is without any scruple of any kind. Why, Go Bang, this very morning, when Kadeena saw Unger Kee's trap was a gonner, he went back to Sitchum, said he was coming to live with her again. She slapped him. He struck her brutally in the face. He's a man that nothing will stop."

"It's likely ways can be found to stop him," says Go Bang, very dry. "I aim to

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make endeavors. Give this here old tub all she's got, Kapsu."

The wind is veering by then, and smoking ashes is falling thick on our boat. You never can tell about these volcanoes in the Aleutians. Sometimes they just puff and snort harmless like some folks, and again they bury villages and swamp ships. But we got shovels aboard for clam digging purposes, and Go Bang and Moxt kept our decks quite clear.

Go Bang comes back into the pilot house, and Moxt too. "As you know, Kapsu," Go Bang says to me, "generally always when, as deputy marshal, I has to make arrests, I makes 'em by hand. Frequent I go forth without no gun of no kind. But if they is fifty or seventy-five savages gone plumb *piblokto,* and just I and you front up to 'em, it's likely we better go shore side all organized."

WITH that Go Bang takes down two big six-shooters, hanging on the house wall, spins the cylinders, hangs 'em on to his belt, and I does similar with a old single six, that throws a slug the size of a thick thumb, that I fetches with me from the time I was a boy in the Cumberlands.

Of a sudden we go plowing through a terruble ash fall. It's so plumb dark we has to navigate by compass. The wind shifts again, and there we be, with our nose almost against the far east end reef of Kiska.

We sling the hook, h'ist Moxt's skin boat, spill out the ashes and water, and go shore side.

To our left is the former channel, now filled complete with the rocks that fetched away when that cliff crashed off. A gentle raise in front of us, and acrost it, between gusts, and sifts of the hot ashes, comes the sound of the thudding of a *tintin* drum, and the guttural, harsh chanting of them *piblokto* Aleuts.

It's no ways encouraging as we ketch the words of the chant, I and Go Bang both understanding the lingo good. It's the torture song. "On her face she lays; she cannot move; and soon she will be dead."

Go Bang looses the guns in the holsters, and goes plowing frantic up the slope. He gets to the crest before I and Moxt. We seen him scrunch down behind a rock.

A whole swarm of seal and walrus spears comes zinging at him, and stick quivering in the ashes abaft of his rock. More spears, singing like mad bumble wasps! Go Bang leaves 'em come for a minute longer. He raises up. He leans kind of careless acrost his rock, a gun in each fist, and he turns 'em loose.

Yelps foller! And rears! Shouts! Very ca'm, Go Bang huddles down, and loads. The flight of spears has quit. I and Moxt run on up, bending low to keep from getting made targets of.

I fetches a look acrost Go Bang's rock. He hain't been burning powder for pastime. Three or four Aleuts lay here, and three or four there, some of 'em kicking and pawing. Them crazy, devil-dancing Aleuts is running in circles. A big white man, that I seen was Kadeena Doreen, he's urging and inciting of 'em to swarm the hill after Go Bang. The only ca'm party is the old savage that stands quiet, banging away animated with a stick on his big copper *tintin* drum.

Just for luck I fans my old six once. When a hole busts out of the middle of his *tintin* drum the old party regards at it plumb astonished, drops it hasty, and goes careening off amongst the rocks.

Still Kadeena is urging the Aleuts to make a charge. Ten or twelve do start, balancing their spears.

"I'm going in amongst 'em," says Go Bang.

He steps out from behind the rock, a gun in each hand, and walks toward them crazy *pibloktos,* his sixes balancing, but proceeding ca'm like he was going to some picnic.

This here is so plumb bold and reckless, them Aleuts come to a stop and stand wopper jawed. It's then Kadeena leaves go a mad beller and he snatches up a spear, and Go Bang leaves go again, and he shoots this spear right out of Kadeena's hand, and, I estimate, a finger or two with it, account of how the blood just spurts.

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From this, because Go Bang never misses where he shoots, I seen he was aiming to take alive this fighter that kills.

Them *piblokto* Aleuts act like they'd had sufficient. But not Kadeena. He goes loping toward where a rifle is leaning acrost a little larch stump. He snatches it up. He turns toward Go Bang.

He's just raising it when a splinter flies right out of the stock and the rifle goes clattering onto the rocks.

For a flash Kadeena stands still. Then he turns, and he run like a deer, up the slope, toward the channel, and Go Bang is just seething along after him.

Away they both go, both dodging in and out among the boulders, slinging up loose ash with their feet. Go Bang aims to take him alive, and they hain't a doubt.

Of a sudden, the fall of ashes kind of quits. I and Moxt, seeing them Aleuts is now plumb peaceable, though they do keep on waving their arms, and pointing toward where Unger Kee's worthless fish trap is, we foller on.

WE arrive up at the top of the slope, over which Go Bang and Kadeena had ran so frantic. We stare down the slope seaward, to where a rock bank breaks abrupt, with a thirty or forty-foot sheer drop to the water.

They hain't a sign of Kadeena nowhere. Go Bang stands on the rock brink, staring stupid down into the water.

I and Moxt arrive up beside him. He just points down into the deep, black water swirling past.

"I'm terrible chagrined," says Go Bang mournful. "I was aiming to take him alive. He must of hit his head when he dove reckless offen this rock. Good a swimmer as Kadeena would 'a' made it easy, without. Yes, he dove desperate right offen this rock. He never come up. The way that flood is setting, the carcass of him is traveling swift toward the Siberia shore. I'm terrible disappointed."

Moxt Pil he stand there, regarding down into the water, and then acrost the little bay at Sitchum's salmon trap, now busting full of fish, though they hain't a soul on the watch deck.

"One thing good," I says kind of more to Moxt than to Go Bang, "it's all ways evident they hain't overhauled and ketched the girl yet. That torture song was just anticipating. They hain't got her yet."

Moxt shake his head, but don't say nothing. He keep on looking down into the water, leaning to see better. "It must be right here, exactly below us," he say final to Go Bang. "I'm sure it is right here. Sitchum she discovered it, and she told me. Kadeena knew it too. No one else but us three knows. It must be right here."

"What! What!" demands Go Bang impatient.

"Why," says Moxt, "one time, her swimming everywhere she took a notion to, Sitchum, diving, discovered they is a under water cave that opens right into this rock below us. She told me, and she told Kadeena. Not to be outdone, Kadeena he dives too, and went into that cave. Sitchum she tells me this cave, the opening three feet or so below the surface of a low tide, is a terrible big room, with a rock shelf, and you can see in this cave dim by the light reflected from the water outside. I figure Kadeena didn't hit his head. He's into that cave, waiting for the hunt to cool, so he can pop out and swim for somewhere."

Go Bang, who hain't never a party to go to expounding out in words, when action is required, is stripping off them heavy guns and belt.

He lays 'em on the rock. He kicks off his shoes, and shucks his coat.

He step to the edge of the rock bank. He look, and estimate a second, and he leans out into space and dives.

Seemed like a hour, I and Moxt is waiting. It is a terrible long time. Even while we was waiting so anxious them Aleuts, kind of recovering back courage, has come over in a band, and they're standing on the rocks that had busted off and filled the channel, and they begin their hocus pocus again, chanting the torture song. It's plenty evident they're holding Sitchum responsi-

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ble for her magic that blew the cliff off and ruined Unger Kee's trap.

I and Moxt stare down into that water till our eyes just bunged. Seemed like it was hours.

It hain't no manner of use for me, account of I can't swim a lick, to go jumping offen this cliff. I looks at Moxt. The most funniest expression goes acrost his face. "In a minute more," he says, "though I hain't no great swimmer, I aim to try. I'm going in."

He kind of stand there, whacking in the air with his hand, like he's telling off the seconds.

They's a swirl in the water below us, like when a seal or sea lion turns to ketch a doging salmon.

Go Bang's head raises slow into sight. He's swimming plenty feeble, Go Bang is, and he's towing something with one hand.

Seeing this is a sheer bank, and they hain't no water edge slope till several yards below, I and Moxt go scrambling over the rocks. We get to this beach ahead of Go Bang. He come in, swimming with one hand, and he's swimming slow. We seen he was bad stove up, one ear kind of hanging, a tear acrost his face. Similar, we seen he was towing a body. It was the fighter that kills, Kadeena Doreen.

We wade in. We pick up this Kadeena. His head rolls very comical. His neck is broke. He's terrible obnoxious to look at, him being the dirty gray-white of a mud shark's belly.

Similar, we seen he had been tore up grievous too.

GO BANG staggers out of the water, stands regarding down at where we'd laid the killer who is plenty dead. Go Bang blows hard.

"I'm all right now," he says after a spell. "I was plumb exhausted. But I'm recovered all back now. It wasn't no church supper fighting this Kadeena. We fit under water, on top, on the rock shelf, everywhere. It's all ways the activest fight I ever was into. I got to give this Kadeena credits. Rat that he was, similar, he was a stanch fighting hand, and they hain't a doubt.

"In the last whirl, when I was tongue-hanging plenty, we clumb the rock bench, and we kind of entangled, and I gets a snub around his neck, and we fall down violent, and his neck fetched in two."

I calls Go Bang's attention to the band of savages that has gathered on the rocks of the filled channel, and banging the shot-up *tintin* drum, and making bad medicine. "I wish we could find this Sitchum girl," I says, "and take her away with us. She'll never, never be safe on this island again."

"No," says Go Bang, "while they keep up that chanting and dancing hocus pocus she wouldn't be no ways safe. Come on. We got to find means and ways to convince them Aleuts to desist."

When them Aleuts seen this Go Bang, all dripping wet, without no shoes, no coat, no gun, I and Moxt running off thoughtless and leaving 'em, why, while they kind of break up into little groups, they stand regarding at us very threatening and obnoxious.

But I got my old single six. Just kind of gesturing significant, I slides it forward on my belt.

"You all Aleuts is plumb eediots," Go Bang opens up on 'em undiplomatic. "If you all is making medicine account of you think white woman magic split off this cliff you is downright crazy. If they is a Tyee chief amongst you, with any brains whatsoever, leave him foller along with me."

A terrible thick built native, with no more forehead than a fish, steps for'ard and announces he's a Tyee.

"Come here then," says Go Bang, and goes to prowling over the biggest rocks that is at the far edge of what used to be the bank of the channel.

Go Bang comes to a stop, pointed down to a edge of a rock, and on to several others.

"You see them smooth round holes into the edge of them rocks?" he asks. "Them's drill hole marks. They were filled with terrible strong gun powder. It wasn't no white woman magic blowed off this cliff,

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it was blowed with blasting dynamite."

And it was. Plumb frantic, shamed, stung, disgraced by Kadeena deserting her for a Klootchman, nights, toiling away constant, when the surf beat to hide the sound, Sitchum had drilled the cliff, loaded it. When the volcano starts she estimates is a good time to touch it off. She done it.

"I helped her drill them holes," says Moxt Pil ca'm. "I fetches the boxes of blasting from Puffin Bird where I buys it from the asbestos mine. I helped her."

"You see they hain't no white magic into that, don't you?" Go Bang insists.

The Tyee nods and says yes.

"Then I got to have solemn promises this white girl, if ever found, will get no harm offen any of you. Otherwise I'll just have to shoot up ten or twelve more of you, and they hain't a doubt."

The Tyee lifts his hands, palms pointing to the North, and the other savages done similar, and that's a plenty solemn and binding oath with the Aleuts. They swore emphatic they wouldn't never hurt Sitchum no more, if she could be found.

Well, we walk back to where Go Bang's guns is, and shoes and coat. I picks up the coat to put it onto him, account of he's wet and must be cold.

"Not yet," he says.

He walk to the edge of the rock again, and he dove off into that channel like he done before.

In just a minute this time he pop back, and he swims along easy to the landing bank, and alongside is this Sitchum swimming easy and graceful as any sea otter.

We welcome 'em at the low bank again. Sitchum's has got some terrible purple marks round her throat. She can't talk, but just nods at us.

"I didn't arrive into that cave none too soon," says Go Bang. "Kadeena had this girl down on the rock shelf, choking her to death, when I makes efforts to convince him to desist."

I just stares agash at Sitchum, imagining how she must of felt, crouched on that shelf, watching the fight to the death between Go Bang and Kadeena Memamloose Doreen, and estimating what would be if Go Bang lose.

First thing, Sitchum hunts up Unger Kee, tries to give the Klootchman the fish trap that is now, and will be forever, taking the big King salmon.

"Wait," says the Klootchman, "no. I no take trap. I take one fish, you take one fish."

That's the way that trap is fishing, half to Sitchum, and half to Unger Kee, and it's taking steady at the rate of forty thousand dollar a year.

THE END

Banana Plants Yield No Seeds

THE banana plant yields only one bunch of fruit to a crop, and only one crop during its life. As soon as the bunch is cut off, the stalk is chopped down and other plants sprout up from the roots. There is no such thing as planting bananas from seed, and if there ever were seeds in the fruit they have long since disappeared from lack of use. All the plants now come from suckers, as the sprouts are called, and these grow so rapidly and easily that a plantation will yield a continuous harvest from one year to another. On some plantations in Costa Rica, which is one of the foremost banana-growing countries in the world, banana trees have been known to reproduce their kind for fifty years without replanting, but this is exceptional.

—*Carl C. Mellor.*

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

"KEEP the patients happy," says

(MISS) J. VAND

I am a receptionist in the office of a well-known physician, and of course part of my job is to keep the waiting-room stocked with good magazines. Last winter one of the patients left a December issue of ARGOSY on the table, and the ensuing patients, both men and women, were so enthusiastic at finding it there that I decided perhaps I was missing something. So I took it home with me that night, and I can't find words to express the pleasure I experienced in reading it. Since then ARGOSY has been a regular feature, both at home and at the office.

Grand Rapids, Mich.

SHE'D like ARGOSY art a little quieter, would:

BETTY WOOD McNABB

Here's a little of everything: criticism, praise, suggestions, cover coupons, and favorite story reasons.

To begin with, my husband is such an avid reader of ARGOSY that if he misses a week, his keenings rise to heaven. I myself never miss a copy, though very often I do not masticate it from cover to cover as he does. Naturally, tastes vary greatly. My favorites are stories of the sea; I particularly like *Singapore Sammy* and his *Blue Goose*. But both my husband and I enjoy sports stories, and would like to see a good football story this fall.

In sending in my cover-vote coupons, if it is possible I'd like a pen sketch of a ship, or something not quite so gory as the usual thing. When this vote project arose, I looked through two or three dozen ARGOSYS to see what might come, and discovered that the great majority of illustrations depict somebody dead, dying, stabbed, shot, being knocked about with fists, or sumpin'. Well, I don't want lovely ladies and wreaths of flowers for every heading, but wouldn't it be possible to choose some dramatic and effective situation which could be less bloodthirsty? For instance, in one installment of "Shark Bait," the heading shows poor *Singapore Sammy* falling down the well. Why wouldn't a sketch of the *Blue Goose* under full sail be more effective? Or some scene which combines interest with appeal from a slightly more pacifistic standpoint than this everlasting death and destruction. Well, enough of criticism.

As for best stories, I prefer George F. Worts' "The Monster of the Lagoon" to any story I have read since the beginning of the year. *Singapore Sammy*, to old ARGOSY readers, is a familiar friend; hence interest is naturally quickened when one picks up a story about one's friends. And Worts knows how to write of adventure; its dangers, its hardships, its highlights and its dark moments. His characters are vividly drawn, and they are human and pleasantly varied.

I saw my amateur-scientist father avidly reading "The Monster," only to stop long enough to exclaim admiringly that "This fellow sets forth a very cleverly composed theory here." And as for my adventure-loving younger brother, he now craves to own a *Blue Goose*. My mother enjoyed vicarious excitement because there were women in the story. Mr. Worts plays a clever

Of Interest to You!

WHAT do you consider the best story (of any length) published in ARGOSY since June 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which name the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others the magazine will give twelve full, yearly subscriptions. Literary style or skill will not count, for what the editors want to know is exactly what stories readers like best, and *why*.

Letters selected will be published from week to week, but ***not all letters published will be rewarded with subscriptions.***

Your letter must reach us not later than January 1, 1936. Address it to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

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hand when he includes a lovely girl so that "us home gals" can sigh and say, "We-l-ll, that might have been me!"

Here's to . . . More *Singapore Sammy*. More anything by Mr. Worts. And a nice prize subscription so that my family and I may continue to read our beloved ARGOSY.

Panama City, Fla.

"WAR DECLARED!" still timely, thinks

R. L. MacGEE

In my opinion, it's exceedingly difficult to choose any one story; I think they are all good. Of course some are much better than others. I have been reading the ARGOSY, the *Argosy-Allstory*, and even before that; and I have always read every story, every week. I think it's a great magazine.

Theodore Roscoe's "War Declared!" was immense, as many readers have told you before. The characters were so true to life; the story itself is true; and it certainly deals with a problem that is right before us at the present time.

Toronto, Can.

"THERE'S another Wilstach historical yarn on the way," is our answer,

G. H. MORTIMER

I've just read John Wilstach's "Motor Circus Murder," and liked it, as I have all of his tales; for he always knows how to combine authentic matter with plot and action. I particularly liked his historical serial, "High Treason," and would like to see more stories about the early history of our country in your magazine, either the American Revolution or the War of 1812. I wish Wilstach would write something along these lines.

Hollywood, Calif.

ARGOSY acrostic, as devised by

W. SHERMAN JOHNSTON

Up to now, I think, "The Mysterious Don Miguel," by Johnston McCulley, is the best story that I have read, and I'll try to tell you why by the use of six adjectives:

A mbitious
R omantic
G enial
O riginal
S ensational
Y outhful

This not only tells of my favorite story, but also names my favorite magazine.

Crocker, Mo.

IMPROVED, in the opinion of

"A. H. L."

I just can't resist writing to congratulate you on the fine lineup of coming stories printed in the back of a recent issue of ARGOSY. Believe me, the magazine is better now than it ever was. It seems to me that you must have changed your editorial policy. There was a time when out of the four serials in the ARGOSY, one would be a Western of the more or less common type, another serial would be a fantastic, and the remaining two would be almost anything, but in all probability would be "character" yarns. Well, that was fine of course; it was better than any other magazine would give for a dime or any other price. But my point is that you never, or at the most rarely ever, published book-length novels about the Foreign Legion or the early days of aviation, or rodeo cowboys, etc.

I repeat: ARGOSY in 1935 is better than ever before, except possibly during the war days.—But I do wish you would give more covers to your serials.

Hollis, N. Y.

OUR good nature wins approval from

(MRS.) RUTH DUNCAN

I never thought seriously of writing you until I read an "Argonote" the other day that decided me. Personally, I think you and some of your best writers must be very good-natured indeed to stand some of the cracks I read occasionally. With so much unclean literature flooding the market as it is now, I think we readers should appreciate the good, clean stories that ARGOSY puts forth, and enough of them so that we can compromise on what we like and what we don't like. It would be absurd for you to try to print ARGOSY to suit everybody's individual taste.

True, there are sometimes stories in it that I don't care for, but perhaps my next door neighbor likes to read those best of all, so who am I to deprive him of that pleasure? And I feel that my say is just as important as that of another reader, having read ARGOSY for fifteen years.—My thanks to you for those years of pleasant entertainment.

Flat River, Mo.

WORDS for the Noble Red Man by

FRANK EISENHARDT

In my opinion, Max Brand is head and shoulders above your other writers, and his "Sacred

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LOOKING AHEAD!

FLYING CIRCUS

They not only startled the world—they startled themselves—that small group of barnstorming aviators who began making aerial history back in 1919. A six part no el by

GEORGE BRUCE

BYNG OF BALLA[illegible]T

Escape from a prison ship and swift adventure in the Australian bush in gold rush days. A novelette by

ANTHONY RUD

THE EXTRA INTELLIGENCE

Man with a super-brain—a daring fantastic short story by

MURRAY LEINSTER

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY — NOVEMBER 30

Valley" is one of his best stories. (I have read ARGOSY for about thirty years and like it.)

I like this type of story because it gives one a clear insight into the life, customs and religion of the American Indian, who was very thoroughly lied to, cheated, misunderstood and misrepresented by our own forbears. These native Americans led a simple and beautiful life; they had as true a religion as any other race; and if we could have more of this kind of story more of us would be willing to concede that in spite of pride of color and race, the white man is really not so very hot, and we would stop carrying around with us so much fatal pride. It is refreshing to read occasionally of the Indian's side, where he is presented fairly, and not as the skulking thief and murderer, sneaking around torturing and scalping the "poor defenseless white." That is the idea of the American Indian taught even to school children. I repeat, I think "The Sacred Valley" is ARGOSY's best story of 1935. Best wishes for your continued success.

Merchantville, N. J.

VOTES FOR 1935 ARGOSY COVERS

ARGOSY COUPON

(1 vote—11-23-35. This coupon not good after Dec. 21, 1935.)

Date cover appeared.....

Or description, if you cannot remember the date.....

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Your name.....

Address.....

NOTE: *The supply of* ARGOSY *original drawings has been exhausted and the offer expires with the Dec. 21 issue.*

THE way education is acquired by

MORRIS J. CORRENTY

Sincere regards from an immigrant who has received more real and lasting education from your magazine than from schools. Stretching it? Not at all. With your magazine as my vehicle, I have traveled to every known part and place in the world's past, present and future. I have met people the schools do not so much as dream exist. Ever since the story, "Darkness and Dawn," appeared in the *Argosy-Allstory* magazine, I have been a constant reader. Yours for longer and happier voyages!

So. Norwalk, Conn.

A 6—23

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212 CAPITAL BANK BUILDING
General Agents

Telephone Main 367

March 15, 1934.

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7617 W. State St.
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

Gentlemen:

I thought it might be interesting for you to know that I had an automatic gas consumption tester attached to my Plymouth Six and obtained an average of 15 miles to the gallon. I then installed your Vacu-matic to satisfy myself as to its merits and under the same conditions and the same course of travel I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, which you see is an increase of 7 miles per gallon. At our present price of gasoline and traveling approximately 1500 miles a month, this means a saving to me of $15.00 a month or $180.00 a year.

I am writing this letter unsolicited on account of the satisfaction I have had since this installation.

You may use this letter as you see fit.

Yours very truly,

F. S. PECK INSURANCE AGENCY,

By

FSP/H

VACU-MATIC

PATENT PENDING

the Carburetor Control that "Breathes"

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, greater speed and smoother running . . . unfolding a new driving thrill for you!

Entirely New — Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—streamlining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The greatest motor improvement of recent years! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of AUTOMATICALLY balancing air and gasoline in correct proportions for ALL speeds! Functioning directly with the manifold vacuum, VACU-MATIC actually "breathes" when needed, giving your motor correct combustion. Sharply cuts fuel wastes, saves dollars in gas costs, reduces carbon and gives your engine new pep, greater power and longer life.

Agents and Salesmen

If you are interested in earning up to $15 daily, check coupon. Exclusive territories now being granted.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, electrically welded into one unit, correctly adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

The VACU-MATIC Co., Wauwatosa, Wis.

* The above letter from California is unsolicited, and is just one of the many letters received from enthusiastic users.

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The VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worth-while gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. "On a test I gained an average of 4 miles on a gallon," writes Alex Wertz. "Vacu-matic is the best I have ever tried." Clarence Rutzin—"I have tried the Vacu-matic on several tests and find that I get between 5 and 6 miles per gallon increase, have more mileage, have greater pickup."

Free Details

Learn about this remarkable device that so greatly affects the entire performance of your motor. Learn why your car is costing you extra money to operate without VACU-MATIC. See why your VACU-MATIC equipped car will leap away from traffic without sputter or hesitation. Discover a new driving thrill and enjoy the savings that more than offsets VACU-MATIC's slight cost. Get the facts! Write today!

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7617-68 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

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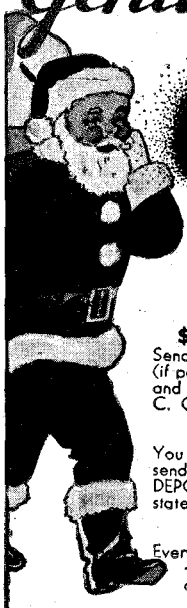

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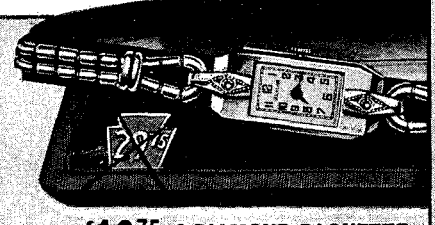

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2 Genuine Diamonds

KJ-3 . . Special value in Gentleman's handsome initial ring of 10K Solid Yellow Gold set with 2 fiery genuine diamonds and 2 solid White Gold initials on genuine black onyx. Specify *initials desired.* **Only $1.88 a month.**

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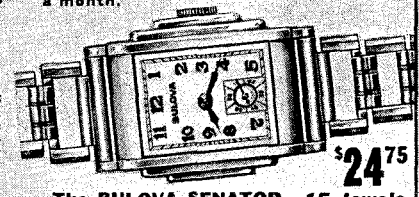

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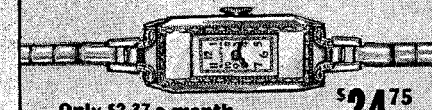

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